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# Waiting for Power: Affection, Ethics and Politics in the Everyday Life of Popular Chile

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# Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

*For Javiera*

## Abstract

Based on fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in *población* 'La Victoria', a working-class neighbourhood in the city of Santiago, this research describes the everyday lives of its inhabitants (*pobladores*) in the context of contemporary neoliberal Chile. Although the *pobladores'* movement had animated Chilean politics since the 1950s, also becoming the main actor in the struggle against the dictatorship, after the return to democracy in 1990 *pobladores* disappeared from the political arena. Most researchers have proposed that the political absence of *pobladores* must be understood as an effect of neoliberal modernization – a set of policies implemented during dictatorship and maintained by successive democratic governments after 1990. Their main argument is that a major cultural transformation in Chile has degraded social ties producing a consumeristic, individualistic and depoliticized society.

Instead, I propose that *pobladores* from La Victoria have, despite the transformations, preserved a form of conviviality based on strong affective bonds with kin, friends and neighbours – alongside equally sentimental separations and divisions from others. I argue that, due to their pervasiveness and importance in *pobladores'* lives, social relationships are the main agents in the articulation of *pobladores'* ethical frameworks guiding their decisions and actions in life. *Pobladores'* affective social relationships have allowed them not only to mitigate the side effects of the current neoliberal model, but also to accept, adapt and contest specific aspects of it. In this sense, life in the *población* has a heterogeneous grammar, a way in which social relations are articulated and disarticulated, activated and de-activated, connecting personal lives to collective processes. This grammar of strong affective ties, terrible betrayals and deep but changing separations and divisions is what I call the 'politics of the everyday life'. This politics of everyday life lies behind apparently very different historical processes, such as the *pobladores'* struggle against dictatorship in the 1980s and their post-1990 absence from the political arena. I contend that what characterizes the current context is not a lack of politics or a 'depoliticization' but a particular way in which certain *pobladores*, known as '*políticos'* – those interested in collective action in order to produce change in the world – are articulated with or disarticulated from other *pobladores* in the politics of everyday life in the *población*.

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# Introduction

## Rodrigo's birthday

It is close to midnight on a Friday in October and I walk with Rodrigo[1] (24) through the streets of a '*villa*' – the name given to middle class neighbourhoods in Chile – of the southern area of Santiago, where he lives with his partner and their little daughter. Until very recently, Rodrigo lived in *población* La Victoria, the place where he grew up and to which he returns every now and then to visit his father and to participate in political activities, organized by his communist friends.[2] It was on one of these activities that I met him and, because his friends were also my friends, Rodrigo decided from the first moment that I was also his friend. Even though up to that day we had only seen each other two or three times, that was enough for him to invite me to his birthday party.

Almost all the party guests are young people that, like Rodrigo, are part of or have at some point been part of Communist Youth – the youth group of the Communist Party – from La Victoria or other *poblaciones* of the same area in Santiago.[3] Asking around, I realize that all of them except one (of at least ten), became party members because their parents or other relatives were militants. After two hours of friendly chatter, including jokes directed at Rodrigo for the 'posh' place in which he now lives, Rodrigo notices that beer is running out and that it will not be enough for the rest of the party.

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[1] All *pobladores'* names in this thesis have been changed to protect their identities.

[2] '*Población*' (plural, '*poblaciones*') is the colloquial Chilean name for working class, low-income or poor neighbourhoods (known in Brazil as '*favelas*' and in Argentina as '*villas miseria*'). Most *poblaciones* are solid and permanent housing developments – and not transitory, as these are called '*campamentos*' – that were formed under state housing programmes for poor people or through a '*toma de terrenos*' (urban land seizure), a direct illegal action carried out by its future inhabitants. As we will see, *Población* 'La Victoria' – the place where I conducted my fieldwork – was the first successful Chilean '*toma de terrenos*' or simply '*toma*', occurring in 1957. *Poblaciones'* inhabitants are traditionally known as '*pobladores*' (singular masculine '*poblador*' and singular feminine '*pobladora*').

[3] Santiago is Chile's capital city. Its population reaches 7 million, almost half of the population of the entire country (16 million). Santiago is geographically and politically divided into 37 districts or '*comunas*', of which 26 are completely urban. *Población* La Victoria is located in Pedro Aguirre Cerda district (centre-south zone of Santiago), which is one of the poorest districts in the city – a district almost completely composed of *poblaciones*.

So, he loudly asks for someone to go and buy more beer with him, and stares directly at me. I say yes, I can go with him.

We walk through the *villa* looking for an open shop in order to buy beer. Almost immediately I note that the area is totally empty, totally different from how full the streets must be at this same time in La Victoria. He only needs this trigger to start a long conversation telling me his thoughts and feelings regarding his new life. As he speaks, I cannot stop thinking that having this conversation was the true reason why he asked me to go with him for the beer. I am also surprised once more – as many times during my fieldwork – by how quickly and how easy it is to achieve these levels of candidness and honesty with *pobladores* that I have known for a very short time. Rodrigo tells me about how sad he is living in the *villa*, about how unhappy and trapped he feels having to live here and not being able to go back to the *población*. 'Look, there is no one on the streets, all the shops are closed, at this time! Here I don't know anybody, no one knows each other. People just come here to sleep, this is a place to sleep in, not to live.' He tells me that the *villa,* unlike La Victoria, 'has no soul, no history', that 'people don't care about you, and you don't care about them'. I answer that for many people it would be a dream come true to come and live in a place that is tidier, that has more space and that is more secure, like this *villa*, that for many people in Santiago a change like this would be a goal, an indicator of economic success. But for Rodrigo, living here is like a sentence:

> I live here because it's best for my partner and my daughter, because here they are all right. In La Victoria, we don't have a house and Joanna doesn't want to go to live there. Many times, I have thought of breaking up with her, because I don't feel well here. But I stay because of them.

Rodrigo also feels trapped in his job, which is precisely what allows him to 'pay the bills' to live here with his family. According to him, 'it makes no sense to spend so many hours doing something so unimportant, just for the money'. I try to say something to make him feel better, but it is difficult to find anything that will cheer him up. During our conversation, we have gone to three alcohol shops and have found them all closed. We slowly return to his house empty-handed, back to the celebration.

**Discontent, the lost community and the blockage of collective action**

Although Rodrigo's story is only one among the thousands of personal stories that can be found in the country, the negative feelings that he experiencing in his life correspond, in a certain way, to the generalized discontent and dissatisfaction in Chilean society that have been consistently documented since the 1990s (Huneeus 2000a PNUD 1998, 2002). Apart from the data obtained from surveys and other research, this is clear in the high rates of depression that, according to Han (2012), place Santiago as the city the world with the second highest prevalence of this illness. This feeling of generalized discontent seems to contradict what has been called 'the Chilean miracle': the neoliberal transformation that, having been installed during dictatorship (1973-1990) and maintained by the post-dictatorship governments (1990-present), has led to a sustained growth of the macro economy since the beginning of the 1990s, plus the growth of employment and the decrease in absolute poverty and destitution.[4] In this context, some social scientists explain this contradiction as caused by a rise in people's expectations due to the rapid economic growth and wider access to certain goods (Bruner 1998, Oppliger and Guzman 2012), while others have noted that this transformation is based on the increasing precariousness of labouring conditions and salaries, over-indebtedness and deterioration of social ties (Han 2012, Huneeus 2000a, Moulian 1997). Beyond these observations, the generalized discontent and frustration are linked to the feeling that what has been gained over the process – which many consider is little to nothing – is less than what has been lost.

If Rodrigo's discontent is in a certain way shared by a wide sector of Chilean society, its particularity is the insight he has regarding the solution to his problem. According to his words, his feelings are not due to his higher expectation of access to material goods, but precisely to what he has lost with this access: his life in the *población*. But what is it that makes life in the *población* so special for Rodrigo? Is it that life in La Victoria is somehow different from that in other parts of Santiago, in a way that it could be the answer to this discontent? Can we not find in the *población* the same

[4] 'The Chilean miracle' is an expression coined by Milton Friedman – the main ideologist of neoliberalism – to describe the economic recovery in Chile, after his shock policies were implemented during dictatorship.

symptoms of neoliberalism as in the rest of the city? Is it simple romanticism, perhaps an expression of the notion of the 'lost community' that some researchers see to be the result of the neoliberal modernization and the source of generalized discontent (Bengoa 2009, Tironi 2005)? There is no doubt that Rodrigo's solution would not be shared by most of the inhabitants of Santiago, who view *poblaciones* as places of poverty, marginalization, drugs and crime. This view is greatly influenced by the media, who, many inhabitants of La Victoria believe, highlight only the acts of violence and drug trafficking in *poblaciones*, and have therefore strongly stigmatized them (Murphy 2015, Wacquant 2008). However, for those who live in *poblaciones* and have grown up in them, it is undeniable that these problems are real but that, at the same time, there is something more to them. This is something that is difficult to describe in words – it is a way of life, a way of being and relating to others, that *pobladores* like Rodrigo cannot find elsewhere. It may be romanticism, but it is a kind of romanticism that originates in *pobladores* themselves.

Despite this difference that Rodrigo and other *pobladores* attribute to life in La Victoria, the discontent experienced in Chilean society does not end at the borders of the *población*. In fact, many of the *pobladores* that I met there also live with frustration regarding their own lives and with nostalgia for a 'lost community'. For them, the 'lost community' is La Victoria of the past, of when the land was taken and the *población* was created (1959), of the celebrations for Allende's[5] triumph (1970), of the time of fear after the coup d'état (1973), and of their heroic moments of struggle against the dictatorship (1983-1988). *Pobladores* feel that much has changed in their lives since then, but there is an element that is particularly relevant for them: they have lost their ability to organize and to collectively struggle for what they believe in. Before their eyes a fragmented and atomized *población* emerges, with no unity and uncaring people with little or no political interest or conscience. Everyone is perceived as trying to improve their own individual life conditions, of throwing themselves into their jobs, consumerism and leisure. Some of the youth, like Rodrigo, have to study or work in order to leave the *población* as soon as possible, while others fall into peer groups that

[5] Salvador Allende was the president of Chile from 1970 to 1973. He was the first Marxist leader in the world to come democratically to power. He died in the assault to government palace during the military coup d'état of September 1973.

lead them to drug commercialization and abuse. Currently, not even the discontent that is felt by most *pobladores* produces collective action in response, as it used to. Politics is locked away from *pobladores* and, for many, this blockade is permanent. The few groups that are still committed to working to improve everyone's lives and to producing collective action carry out their activities without actually believing that they can achieve any of those goals. Is life then any different in the *población* from life in other places in neoliberal Chile? Have *pobladores* – and the popular sectors[6] in general – lost the ability they once had to break into the city and the spaces of the elite to transform politics and history? Why then, do Rodrigo and other *pobladores* still consider – despite their overall pessimism – that the *población* has 'something' that makes it different from other places?

**The great transformation and the politics of everyday life in the *población***

When I began working on my research, the main question I wanted to address was linked to what has been called 'depoliticization', the 'loss of the centrality of politics' or even 'the end of politics' in Chilean post-dictatorship society (Baño 1995, Frazier 2007, Lechner 1986, 1998, Stern 2006). I believed at that time, based on the majority of research carried out in Chile since 1990, that a great neoliberal transformation had taken place, deeply changing Chilean political culture (Carlin 2006, Garreton 2003, Guell et al. 2003, Huneeus 2000b, Larrain 2001, Lechner 1998, Moulian 1997, Parker 2000, PNUD 2002, Silva 2004). The clear disengagement of Chileans from politics – especially, but not exclusively, in its institutionalized forms – shown in all surveys and in the decrease in the number of voters at elections, supported such a statement (Cantillana 2009, CEP 2010, CIEPLAN 2008, Huneeus 2005, Latinobarometro 2008, Navia 2004, Toro 2008).[7] But possibly more relevant still was the absence from the political arena, after 1990, of the popular sectors that had animated it since mid-century and even during the dictatorship (Paley 2001). This further confirmed the depoliticized condition of the new neoliberal Chile. Considering all this, my study sought to observe in the daily life of popular sectors the depth and characteristics of this transformation

[6] Popular sectors refers to the segments of society that are economically, socially and culturally marginalized. In Chile they represent the majority of the population and include workers, pobladores, peasants and indigenous peoples.

[7] From 90% of voting people in 1988 to 35% in 2016 (Navia 2004, https://www.servel.cl/).

and to identify the everyday spaces of resistance (following Scott's work (1985)), if there were any. I chose *población* La Victoria because, due to its history of collective struggle and political engagement before and during dictatorship, it represented a contrasting example of Chile in the present, and in its recent past.

However, as often happens with ethnography, my conceptions and points of view were radically altered once in the field. Living in La Victoria, I started to realize that not only was the question on 'depoliticization' inadequate in the context of the *población*, but also that what I called 'politics' – from a one-dimensional, ideological and institutional perspective – had to be reformulated in light of the kind of politics that emerged or could emerge from that particular social space. In other words, the everyday life of the *población* had its own politics that could only be described in its own terms. My new point of view was that if the absence of popular sectors – and of *pobladores* in particular – from the national political arena was a central phenomenon of post-dictatorship Chile, this phenomenon could only be understood properly from the politics of *pobladores* themselves and not as a result of the lack of politics.

This thesis, based on 14 months of ethnographic research, intends to describe the everyday life of *pobladores* of La Victoria, particularly the way in which their social relations are conceptualized, built, activated and deactivated and the role that these relationships have on the way that politics is constructed in the daily life of the *población*. My main objective is to show that, contrary to what the thesis of neoliberal transformation in Chile suggests, the politics of *pobladores* is placed in an affective/sentimental plane that exists prior to – and is constitutive of – such specific and apparently uneven results as the generalized mobilizations of the 1980s against the dictatorship and the 'depoliticization' in democracy since the 1990s. In other words, I suggest that the new neoliberal values and ethical frameworks – individualism, consumerism, competition – not only do not represent a profound cultural change in the *población*, but that what makes these frameworks possible is precisely the politics of the everyday life of *pobladores*. To argue this, I call attention to the fact that two of the main characteristics considered as products of the neoliberal transformation, the fragmentation or atomization of popular sectors and their lack of ideological conscience, may also be found at moments of widespread political mobilization (like

the time of the *toma* of La Victoria in 1957 and the struggle against dictatorship in 1983-88). Furthermore, this thesis shows that the strong affective relations, solidarity between neighbours and groups of *pobladores* that seek to generate collective action – that supposedly characterized the 'political' moments – are as present today as they were in the past. This, I believe, is what *pobladores* like Rodrigo fail to find in other parts of the city.

With this argument I do not mean in any case that there have been no relevant changes in the lives of *pobladores* over the last years, nor that the *población* is today exactly the same as it was in the past. The strong presence of drugs (traffic and consuming), the wider access to goods through the expansion of credit and debt, the high work demands on many *pobladores*, the high incidence of this indefinable discontent and of mental illnesses, and the marked disdain for, and disconnection from, institutional politics are characteristic of these times. However, as Han (2012) has shown in her ethnography in the Chilean *población* La Pincoya, situations such as the lack of economic means, the pressure of debt, drug addiction and mental illnesses are all mitigated by *pobladores* through relationships of affection and care within homes and among neighbours. Moving further, I suggest that these relations, due to their intensity and omnipresence in the lives of *pobladores*, produce shared ethical frameworks of action, decision and opinion that lead them to accept, alter or reject many of these current conditions. But also, as this ethical framework is a product of a limited number of relations with family, friends and neighbours, it is not extensible to all *pobladores*. For this reason, life in the *población* is deeply fragmented, composed of an endless number and variety of groups that are very close affectively internally, but that express differences and distances – marked by the lack of affection, dislike and resentment – from other groups (this description of *poblaciones* is similar to the one suggested by Espinoza (1993)). As I have mentioned earlier, this heterogeneity is not explained by the neoliberal transformation and is traceable back to the foundation of the *población*. Some scholars consider this a central characteristic of the popular sectors (Butler, Laclau and Zizek 2000, Laclau 2007). However, this heterogeneity has not stopped *pobladores* from developing historic cycles of strong political mobilization and collective struggle against the prevailing order. On the contrary, as I describe in this thesis, it has been precisely these strong relations of affection – that also lead to the

ethical heterogeneity of the *población* – that have been the basis for the cycles of popular struggle of *pobladores*, of those who have less power in the country. In this sense, although many things have changed in the *población*, its central elements that allow both the current order and its transformation, remain in the lives of *pobladores*.

While the first chapters of this thesis focus on describing the characteristics of everyday life, the effects of social relations and how groups and people come together and fall apart, the second part delves into the situation of political groups in the *población* (pobladores who participate in these groups are locally called *políticos*, literally 'politicians'). Apart from highlighting their relevance in the cycles of political mobilization in the past, I describe their current condition showing how the recent historical processes experienced in this country have driven them to have a very negative view of their own ability for political action in the present. In brief, *pobladores políticos* feel that they can do nothing to change a world that does not depend on them, even if historically they were capable of confronting more adverse conditions (during the dictatorship, for example). Besides, picking up on the neoliberal transformation discourse, they view the fragmentation and lack of political conscience in the *población* as insurmountable obstacles. However, these characteristics were not an obstacle in the past, when through reckless and highly visible actions – under the politics of armed struggle – they produced and reproduced a collective ethical displacement and led very diverse groups into the struggle against dictatorship. Even though today they lead a political life that is full of contradictions and that they are, in a certain way, stuck in time, it is possible to observe how their actions can still generate effects – although temporary and inconsistent – in the ethical frameworks of the rest of the *pobladores*. More than depoliticized or de-ideologized, *pobladores políticos* are simply waiting to recover the power they once had, to go out again into the streets to change the world.

In order to understand the processes that *pobladores* have gone through, and to give a clear historical context to the chapters in this thesis, over the following two sections I will provide firstly a brief review of the history of Chile – focusing especially on popular groups and on the processes and events of recent decades – and, secondly, I will provide a description of *Población* La Victoria and its history.

**From colonial to neoliberal times**

The whole history of Chile as an independent country may be seen as a long and intermittent struggle of certain minority groups from the elite and particularly from the popular sectors against a small, privileged elite that has governed the country under diverse guises for more than 200 years. The only period in which this elite was effectively threatened and inequality was consistently reduced was during the government of Salvador Allende (1970-1973). The socialist experience had a short lifespan and after the coup d'état of 1973, a cruel and repressive dictatorship stayed in power for 17 years. The post-dictatorship period of 'democratic transition' began in 1990 and continues today.

Like most Latin American countries, Chile began its national life in the first decades of the 19th century, after achieving its independence from the Spanish colonial empire. This independence, as many historians have highlighted, did not imply a change of any kind on the social structure of the country (Jocelyn-Holt 1999, Salazar and Pinto 1999). The local colonial elite – of Castilian-Basque origin – became the new national elite. At the same time, most of the so called '*bajo pueblo*' or '*pueblo mestizo*' lived dispersed in the countryside or in small villages in the land of big landowners or *hacendados*, in very precarious conditions. This was the overall situation of most of the Chilean population over the 19th century. Although nominally Chilean, a wide territory in the south was still controlled by the *Mapuche* until the so-called 'Pacification of Araucanía' (1861-1883) period in which the Chilean state gradually occupied this territory, through war against the *Mapuche*, until they controlled it completely.

The 20th century starts with the first worker strikes in the north of the country – an area that suffered strong repression from the state. This period is called '*la cuestión obrera*' (the social question in Chile). During this period, different political actors explored answers to the terrible conditions in which the popular sectors in the north and the big cities lived and sought to support the popular mobilizations that started to develop in different parts of the country. In this context, the first unions and labour parties started to develop (like the Communist Party of Chile in 1912). All this led to a moment of political instability and economic crisis (1920-1938), in which the

national elite lost some of its hegemony. At the beginning of the century, although under democratic governments, still a very small part of the population could effectively vote at elections. However, as the century moved on, and due to the struggle and pressure, the voter pattern started to progressively widen, enabling a more diverse electoral offer with parties of the left and centre. On the other hand, as a consequence of the global crisis of 1929, the traditional liberal politics were replaced by a new model of Keynesian inspiration that sought to industrialize and economically modernize the country. This model was maintained until the coup d'état of 1973.

Together with the strikes and proletariat demonstrations, the first part of the 20th century was characterized by the phenomenon of rural-urban migration. Although this process had begun in the 19th century, it is clearly midway through the 20th century that it grows and its dire consequences start to be experienced on a greater scale. While in 1865 only 30% of the population lived in cities, by 1930 the percentage rose to 50% and by 1970 to almost 80%. Between 1940 and 1960, the number of inhabitants of Santiago doubled (De Ramon 2000). As the new inhabitants were mostly poor and lacking places to live, provisional camps (*campamentos*) started to grow on the outskirts of the cities. People lived in overcrowded spaces lacking basic health and hygiene conditions. As the solutions proposed by successive governments were not enough, the new inhabitants of the cities started to organize and to search for their own answers. This marks the beginning of the *pobladores*' movement and the *tomas* of land (the first successful *toma*, was that of La Victoria in 1957) (Espinoza 1988, Garces 2002, Salazar 2006).

From the middle of the century until 1970, the country went through a process of growing political struggle expressed in a rise in strikes and street demonstrations, *tomas* of land in rural and urban areas, an increase in the number of party militants, the presence of mass leftist parties, the multiplication of unions and the increase in electoral participation of popular sectors. As political parties played a major role in this process, the generalized confrontations in society were experienced inside as well out of the political system. Towards 1970, there was a crucial electoral triumph when Salvador Allende, the candidate of the parties of the left grouped in the Unidad Popular

(UP), was elected president[8]. Chile become the first country in which a Marxist and revolutionary project came to power through democratic means. This is possibly the major original element of Chilean history within contemporary world history.[9]

The UP's government nationalized copper mining and many private companies, accelerated the process of land reform and land redistribution in the countryside, expanded the role of the state within the economy, increased public services and fostered an even wider democratization. But, at the same time, it had to deal with the global economic crisis, with increased social spending due to its socialist agenda, with the US blockade and interference and constant obstruction from the internal elite's opposition. All this led to a deep and enduring crisis. Basically, the central problem was that the revolutionary project clashed with the principles of liberal democracy and the legal limits of the system, while the conservative elite had kept much of its traditional power to maintain these limits. The result was a climate of ideological polarization in which organized leftist groups and popular sectors called for the acceleration of the revolutionary process and the elite groups (political right and centre) sought the destabilization of the government and its fall, leading to a generalized political crisis within the country. According to Moulian, in UP's government:

> The development of the process did not allow it to gain more strength, on the contrary it broke, it wore it down. After three years without conceptually deciding the path, doubting between 'advancing without compromising' or 'negotiating to obtain stability', the UP let the last wagons of history pass it by. (1997:164)

The final result of the political polarization and the economic crisis was the military coup d'état of 1973, supported by the national elite, the USA and a large number of

[8] Unidad Popular (Popular Unity) was a conglomerate of left-wing Marxist parties and groups whose main members were the Socialist Party and Communist Party of Chile.

[9] *'Chile faces the need to start a new way of constructing a socialist society: our own revolutionary way, the pluralistic way, anticipated by the classics of Marxism, but never before materialized... Chile is today the first nation on Earth called to shape the second model of transition towards a socialist society'* (Allende 1971). This is an extract of Allende's speech to parliament known as 'The Chilean way to socialism'. These few words help us to see the profound revolutionary character of Allende's project. The first model referenced by Allende is the proletarian dictatorship of USSR.

people from the middle class. Given the widespread vision of institutional stability in the country and of its democratic culture and the hatred and resentment that had built up over UP's years, the event was symbolically and physically devastating. The military government that followed soon became one of the most violent, dramatic and totalitarian dictatorships in Latin America. Thousands were killed, arrested, tortured and exiled, and up until today there are hundreds of people still missing.

The military government set out to eliminate not only all dissent through repression and fear, but also to refound the social order through the reduction and dismantling of the state, the proscription of all political activity and the implementation of a neoliberal agenda in every aspect of social life.[10] It aimed to promote a set of social and institutional transformations in a process known as *modernizaciones* (modernizations). The main objective of this process was to achieve the atomization of social relations, reducing them to the market mechanism, eliminating their bond with politics (Garreton 2003, Huneeus 2000a). These measures also had as a direct consequence the impoverishment of a great part of the population, the loss of job posts and of anti-union practices, all of which was undertaken without appeal due to the violent and coercive nature of the regime (Lechner 1986, Moulian 1997). Chile became in 1975 the first laboratory of experimentation for Chicago neoliberal economists – Chicago boys – who implemented a structural adjustment programme that was applied later in most countries of the world (Harvey 2007).

In the 1980s, however, despite the fear of violent military repression, the extreme economic crisis caused by neoliberal policies and the lack of freedom led to confrontations with the military regime from 1983 to 1988 with grassroots inhabitants as the main actors – together with students, civil society organizations and returning politicians. Several *poblaciones* experienced over this time the flourishing of many social organizations dedicated mainly to collectively confronting the economic crisis

[10] According to Harvey, *'Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices (...) In so far as neoliberalism values market exchange as "an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs", it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace'* (Harvey 2007:2-3).

and political repression. Also, in parallel, an armed front of struggle began to develop, led by national guerrillas and local armed groups.

In order to end the political crisis derived from internal protests and international political and economic pressures, the military government was finally forced to compromise with moderate forces on a transition to democracy plan which sought to restore power to civilians, while keeping the neoliberal economic model and the authoritarian political system intact. A plebiscite was called (1988) in which many people participated (97% of those registered to vote) which resulted in the end of the dictatorship. Although this pacific format of transition from dictatorship to democracy has been praised for its civility, the lack of a radical separation between the two orders substantially determined the characteristics of the period that followed the dictatorship (Frazier 2007).

Most of the Chilean population experienced the return to democracy in 1990 with high expectations of political freedom and of improvement in social conditions. However, unlike democratization processes in other countries in the region (such as Brazil or Argentina), Chile's agreed transition to democracy was strictly formal: it included recovered political rights (to vote in elections) and certain political freedoms while at the same time the rest of the structural and institutional neoliberal changes of the dictatorship were maintained. Although the exclusion and socio-economic condition of popular sectors were almost the same or even worse than in the 1960s and 1970s, grassroots inhabitants and many social groups withdrew from the public arena. The social forces that had fought for the restoration of democracy vanished and the population in general retired to their private worlds. Professional politicians that had opposed the dictatorship undertook the administration of the political and economic model that has been kept almost without alterations for 27 years.[11]

[11] The moderate political parties of the center-left that opposed the dictatorship – amongst them the Christian Democratic Party and a renewed Socialist Party – formed a coalition for the plebiscite of 1988 that was later known as '*Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia*' or simply '*Concertación*'. This coalition governed the country for 20 years – winning all the elections – until, in 2010, they lost the presidential election to the center-right coalition with their candidate Sebastián Piñera. For the following elections of 2013, the coalition included the Communist Party and other forces and changed their name to '*Nueva Mayoría*'. At the elections, their candidate, former president Michelle Bachelet, was elected

Although in the previous sections, I have already referred to the main characteristics of the post-dictatorship period, I would like to add a few final ideas. This period, beginning in 1990 and stretching until today, has been very stable in political terms and in its first years was marked by strong economic growth centred on big business and the financial sector. For most of the population, however, the economic model has implied a wider access to goods through debt, overwork, high job instability and informality. Chile has considerably increased its GDP per capita, but at the cost of low public expenditure, deepening social inequality, privatized public services and a strong socio-cultural marginalization and spatial segregation of popular sectors in the city and countryside. In this context, the political stability achieved over the first two decades post-dictatorship was mainly due to the virtual nonexistence of relevant social movements – discontent not expressed in the political arena – rather than people's active commitment and acceptance of the model. In this way, from the first half of the 1990s, a sustained drop in the legitimacy of the institutional order started to be evidenced – through surveys and electoral participation – which finally became visible in national politics in 2011.

In that year, there were several local and regional demonstrations that had ample press coverage. Particularly there were the strong and massive student mobilizations, characterized by the largest demonstrations in the country since the return to democracy. This movement sought to de-privatize education, returning it to its status as a social right. Although this issue addressed the central aspects of the neoliberal model, it was treated strictly as a problem of the educational system. In my opinion, while this issue had overall acceptance from most of the population – according to surveys and quantitative research – it did not have an effective participation of the popular sectors, workers, *pobladores* and least of all, peasants. In sum, people accepted the relevance of the issue, but there was no sustained political commitment as it never stopped being a problem of only one group (students). The questions asked in this thesis are what happens politically in the popular sectors and through what kind of

again for the period 2014-2018. For a description of Michelle Bachelet's visit to *población* La Victoria during her campaign, see Chapter 6.

politics they could become effectively involved – if they wished so – in the national political arena.

### *Población* La Victoria

Founded in 1957, La Victoria is a small *población* or working class neighbourhood in the district of Pedro Aguirre Cerda (south-west area of Santiago), that currently has around 20,000 inhabitants. For a variety of reasons, that will be described here, this *población* is one of the most emblematic and well-known *poblaciones* of Santiago. Because of this, many people from Santiago would associate it with repression in the dictatorship, with its famous priests, or both, although many would also relate it to drugs, violence and poverty, as they would any other *población*. Despite its name being recognized by many people in Santiago, only a few would really know where it is located.[12]

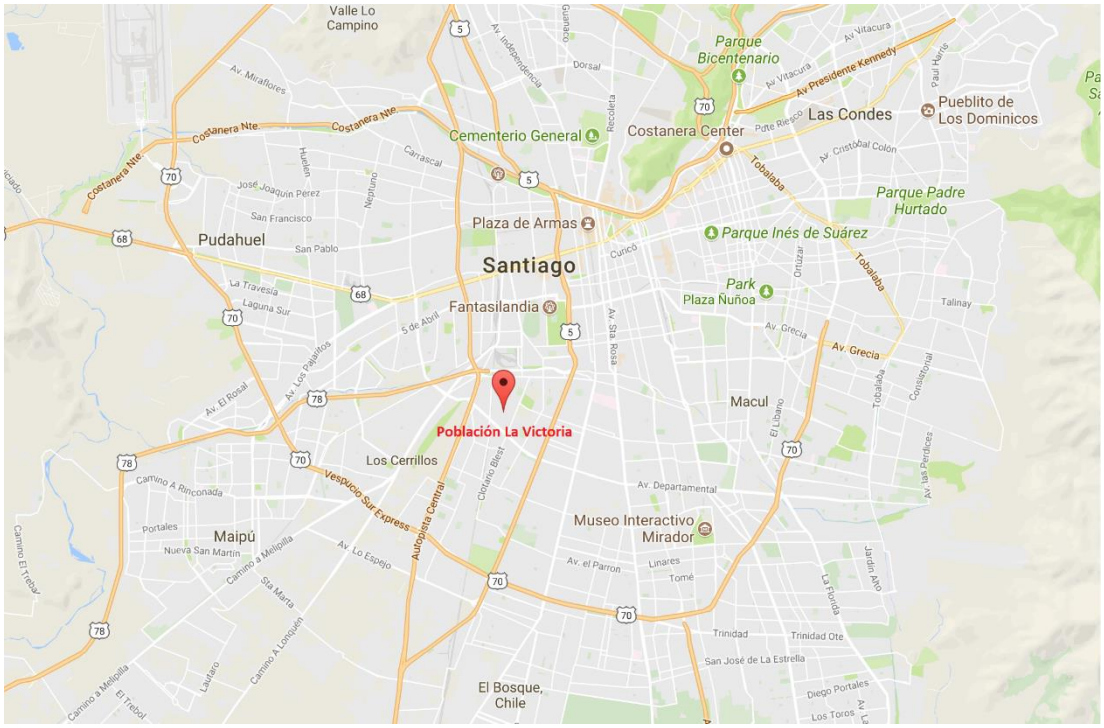


Figure 0-1: Location Map of La Victoria in Santiago (source Google Maps)

As it emerged from an occupation of land and was built by its own inhabitants, on a general overview the *población* can be described by the irregular patterns of its houses,

[12] These associations became evident for me each time I told my friends or family members that I would live or was living in the *población* for my ethnographic study.

the narrowness of its streets and its urban geographic disconnection from the rest of the city (its streets do not directly connect to the city streets and avenues that lead to it). But also, those who visit for the first time are surprised by the number of murals – artistic expressions from the time of the dictatorship that are still relevant today – and by the names of the streets that clearly show the political orientation of the founders of the *población* (streets are named Carlos Marx, Unidad Popular, Primero de Mayo, etc.). Inside, the *población* has two schools, a public medical centre, a police office, a community hall (neighbourhood organization), three sport courts, two small squares, the local office of the Communist Party – where many of the events described here take place – a Catholic church, many evangelical churches and an even higher number of small grocery shops (that are part of their owners' houses). There are also social organizations, especially those dedicated to sports, as well as seniors' clubs, women's centres, cultural centres – although only two have their own spaces – Catholic organizations, two local radios stations and a community TV channel that broadcasts intermittently.

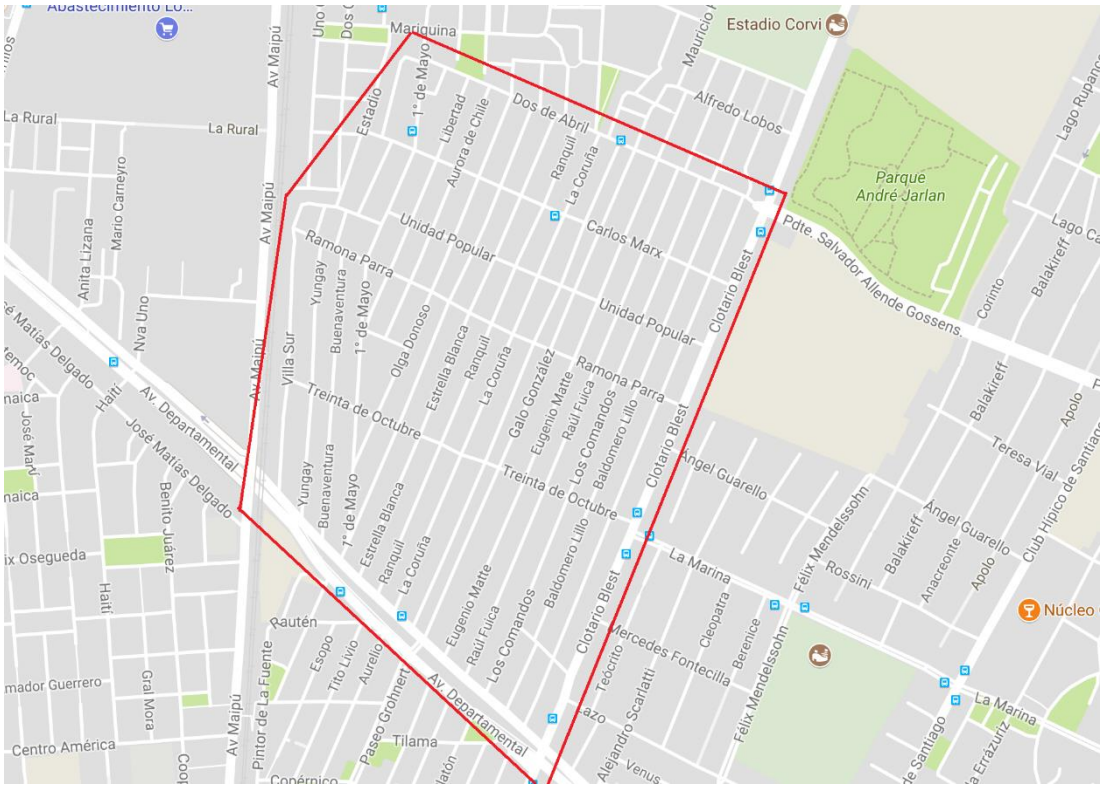


Figure 0-2: Map of La Victoria (source Google Maps)

In order to understand why this *población* has a place in Santiago's collective memories and why its name is in much of the research on the history of the popular sectors and *pobladores* in Chile, I must provide a brief description of its history. This description will also serve as a local historical framework for the chapters of this thesis.[13]

Towards 1950, Santiago was going through a process of accelerated growth produced by the immigration of people who had been living in rural areas or in other cities. This demographic pressure and the incapacity of the government to address housing problems forced many of the new inhabitants to stay in provisional camps or *campamentos* that were very precarious and had unhygienic conditions. The largest of these camps was in an area called 'Zanjón de la Aguada', a brook that runs through the southern area of Santiago. The conditions of poverty and marginality in this and other camps were extreme, making the situation unsustainable. On the 2nd of April 1957, after a call to a demonstration against the government by the student unions – a demonstration that addressed various issues, not necessarily about the life conditions of the inhabitants of the camps – the situation exploded and the city centre was taken over by the poor of the city, who destroyed everything they found in their path. After three days of violent protests – from which the students and workers retreated – the government decided to militarily repress the protesters. This was the first manifestation of the *pobladores*' movement (Espinoza 1988, Salazar 2006).

In the months and weeks before the foundation of La Victoria, there were many fires in the Zanjón de la Aguada camp. So, some of its inhabitants, tired of waiting for the government to do something and due to the precarious conditions in which they were living, decided to find a solution to their problem independently. In the dawn of 30th October 1957, a slow and silent line of people set off from the camp of the Zanjón towards a ranch known as 'Chacra La Feria', an empty and non-urbanized piece of land that belonged to the state. In their pilgrimage, others who also needed a place to live joined them – especially homeless people from *población* La Legua – another well

[13] There are three books written by *pobladores* themselves (GIMP 2003, GSP 1989, GTLV 2007) and several academic articles and book chapters (Cortés 2014, Espinoza 1988, Farias 1989, Garcés 2002) on La Victoria´s history and *pobladores*' memories.

known población of Santiago. On that very day, between 1,200-2,000 families occupied the ranch Chacra La Feria in an action that defied the legal dispositions of the time.

Once they were settled, they had to face a harsh siege and repression from the police. The government of President Carlos Ibáñez del Campo wanted them taken off the land, but as it did not have citizens' support, a direct attack would have been very damaging to its legitimacy. The *pobladores* were therefore surrounded by the police for many days, while Cardinal José María Caro and some politicians from the left made intense efforts to get permission for the people to stay. These first days were of permanent confrontation with the police, worsened by the precariousness of the living conditions (tents and canopies). Because of the cold and rains at that time of the year more than ten babies died in the new *población*. Despite the siege, the people did not leave and, after a few days, the government finally accepted for them to stay. The people decided to name their *población* La Victoria (literally 'The Victory') in order to remember their achievement. In that moment, La Victoria became the first successful occupation of land or *toma* (there had been some attempts before but with no success) and the founding rock of the movement of *pobladores* (Garcés 2002, Salazar 2012).

Figure 0-3: First days of the *toma* (source Gianotti 2014)

Once they had achieved their first objective, *pobladores* took up the task of building the *población*. With the help of university students, they mapped out the streets and the *población* was divided into plots of 8x16 meters. Each family received a plot and

with the help of neighbours, friends and relatives, they started to build their houses. Also with the work of all *pobladores*, the school was built in the allotment assigned for that purpose. Over the years and through their own struggle, *pobladores* obtained drinking water, lighting and sewerage. The leaders at that time were part of the Socialist Party, the Catholic Church and, mainly, the Communist Party.

Figure 0-4: La Victoria in 1959 (source Gianotti 2014)

In 1970, when the *población* was fully built, Salvador Allende and the UP parties won the presidential elections with a generalized support from the *pobladores* of La Victoria. Allende's campaign visit to the *población* is still remembered with emotion by some of the *pobladores*. Over the three years of his government, and in spite of the economic crisis, most of the inhabitants of La Victoria kept their support – this is the opinion of all of the *pobladores* that I talked to. Because of this, the coup d'état in 1973 and the death of Allende was experienced with a mixture of sadness, disbelief and bewilderment. *Pobladores* – like most of the country – were not prepared for a situation like this and did not know how to react. Also, the pervasive rumour that the *población* would be bombed – as the palace of government had been – filled *pobladores* with fear and left then helpless for the first few days after the coup. The military finally came to the *población*, heavily armed, arrested some *pobladores* and, as a show of intimidation, destroyed the Catholic parish church. From that moment on *pobladores* lived in fear of the frequent instances of repression (some of the experiences are described in Chapter 4).

After a few years of no reaction, at the beginning of the 1980s certain groups of *pobladores* – especially young people – started to organize to counteract and confront the dictatorship. The economic crisis of 1982-83, a result of the neoliberal modernization, together with a social and political environment that had warmed towards action, led to the creation of many organizations with this purpose and to the rise of political activity in the *población*. This process of incubation had its pinnacle in the first national protest of 1983. The mass participation of *pobladores* and their show of commitment turned La Victoria – and other 'emblematic' *poblaciones* – into some of the few spaces of direct confrontation and permanent opposition to the dictatorship – from that moment up until the end of the mobilizations (1988). Not only did social organizations grow and multiply, but there was also a parallel armed struggle at the local and national level.

After 21 days of protest, the dictatorship agreed to hold a plebiscite in 1988 to decide on its future. Although most groups in the *población* actively participated in the process, many *pobladores* did not trust the mechanism and were sure that there would be fraud. However, surprisingly the results made 'NO' the winner, and the process of 'transition' to democracy began. According to *pobladores*, once the end of dictatorship had been sealed, most of the social and political organizations that had animated the struggle were left almost empty. Only a few *pobladores* remained in them, while the majority started to work for the improvement of their living conditions, through labour and the acquisition of material goods. As political groups lost their relevance, drugs and drug-dealing gangs took over the streets (for descriptions on this transformation, see Chapter 3). Apparently, La Victoria was finally hit by the economic model (a way of life oriented towards the market) and its side effects. However, many historic organizations have lived on, as have many of the traditions from the time of the occupation, of Allende and of the struggle against dictatorship.

**Brief discussion on research lines**

Although this thesis is nurtured by and engages with diverse lines of political and anthropological research, in general terms it can be inscribed within the – not so new – new political anthropology, that considers politics not as 'instrumental action' in an institutional arena, but as a daily space in which people express their local and

significant interests, differences and values (Forbess and Michelutti 2013, Spencer 1997). Although I personally agree with this understanding of 'the political', it turned out to be the case that given the specific conditions of the place I chose for my study, no other definition would have led to any relevant results. *Población* La Victoria, and in general popular sectors in Chile, after the return to democracy, have been profoundly disengaged and disconnected from formal institutionalized politics. At the most, some research has highlighted the clientelism networks of some political parties in very specific areas.[14] It seemed necessary to find a perspective to address the local and contextual conceptions of the political for research in these sectors.

For this reason, I am much more interested in the daily experiences of the lives of *pobladores* than in their vertical connections with the state, governmental agencies and other institutions. This does not mean that these connections do not have a relevant presence in the current lives of *pobladores*. However, I considered it a more urgent task to describe the kind of politics that characterized life in the *población*, in order to afterwards be able to understand the connections or disconnections of *pobladores* with the wider political system. Even in the only chapter in which I do address extensively an aspect of formal politics – Michelle Bachelet's campaign and her visit to the *población* – it is to try to understand a particular aspect of the politics of *pobladores*. I consider that much of the political anthropology research that has been carried out in contemporary Latin America has lost insight in trying to delve into the immediate disputes between communities and the state, without analysing the dynamics that politics assume within the communities in the first place – following, therefore, a much more ideological, formal or instrumental understanding of politics.

This concern for social relations and daily life was the main reason that led me to look towards studies on kinship – and friendship – that have become highly relevant for anthropology today. The connection between politics and kinship is present throughout the thesis, starting with a discussion on social relations and affection and concluding by analysing the possibilities for achieving collective action. Between these two

[14] Normally these networks have been understood form the point of view of an instrumental logic. For a different perspective on this problem in Buenos Aires, see Auyero 2001.

conceptual frameworks, I sought to add a third component that would serve as a connection between the former: the anthropology of ethics. This line of investigation was very useful as definitions of virtue and of what is the right or wrong thing to do are a fundamental aspect of the everyday lives of *pobladores*. Going even further, it is possible to understand gossip as a great agora for the discussion of ethical limits. Although this is an important aspect of social life, following Zigon (2014) I do not consider that the ethical should replace everything that is implied in the concept of 'social'.

This thesis is particularly in conversation with its closest precursors, the research of Julia Paley (2001) in *población* La Bandera and Clara Han (2012) in La Pincoya. Like their accounts, this piece of research delves into the lives of Chilean *pobladores* in the post-dictatorship, neoliberal context. Paley's research, however, focused on showing the subjacent conceptualizations of the new Chilean democracy (her research was carried out in the early 1990s) and how they deliberately sought to de-mobilize the same popular sectors that had fought for the end of dictatorship. Although this market democracy is still present currently, it is now impossible not to consider the agential action of *pobladores* themselves in the resulting processes. This does not mean in any way to blame the victim. However, when I witnessed the affection of *pobladores* for a politician such as Michelle Bachelet, I understood that the young democracy must have had at least some level of legitimacy, for *pobladores* to retire from the political arena so suddenly. All the same, I consider that Paley's ethnography is an excellent description of what *pobladores políticos* experienced when their control stopped operating during the 1990s.

Maybe Paley's ethnography would have been more nuanced had it assumed a perspective similar to Han's. Han's ethnography that I consistently reference throughout this thesis is a very deep and intimate portrait of the life of *pobladores*. Although many of her observations were confirmed in my own research, I must make explicit some differences that are evidenced in the chapters of this piece of research. Firstly, Han's interest in the description of the most dramatic effects of neoliberalism such as drugs and mental illnesses is an importance difference from my work. This does not mean in any case that these elements were not present in the lives of

*pobladores*, but that they shared relevance – from my point of view – with many other elements of joy, sense of humour, solidarity, and community within and outside the home. In particular, I believe that the strong ties of affection between people are not only observed in care from some people towards others, but in the daily humour shared by those who know themselves to be close. In fact, it was through humour that I first came to activate relationships of friendship and kinship (see Chapter 1). Secondly, there is marked disinterest in Han for connecting her observations to the political dynamics within the *población*. Although this is a very valid option – as is the former – in my fieldwork, the politics of everyday life emerged in a self-evident way when I started to relate to others in the *población*. I believe my research comes to connect that of Paley and Han, but in a different *población* from the ones they described.

**Argument and chapters**

The central argument of this thesis is that the way in which social relations between *pobladores* are conceived and the deep affections that they imply, transform them into the main agents in the organization of frameworks for decisions, opinions and actions of *pobladores* within their life-worlds. Against the thesis that suggests a degradation of social ties as a result of the neoliberal transformation, my research suggests that it is the strong affective relations of *pobladores* that have allowed them not only to mitigate the side effects of the neoliberal model, but have also led them to accept, adapt and contest all or some of the aspects of this model. Life in the *población* has a particular grammar, a way in which social relations are articulated and disarticulated, activated and de-activated, connecting personal lives to collective processes. This grammar of strong affective ties, terrible betrayals and deep but changing separations and divisions between *pobladores*, is what I call the 'politics of everyday life'. It is this politics of everyday life that is behind historical processes that are apparently very different such as the struggle of *pobladores* against dictatorship and their absence from the political arena after 1990. What characterizes the current context is not the lack of politics or a 'depoliticization' of *pobladores*, but the way in which those *pobladores* who are called *políticos* – those who had a central role in the historic political processes of the past – are articulated with or disarticulated from others in the politics of everyday life in the *población*.

Although the chapters of this thesis are ordered to form a unified argument, the fact is that from the beginning it was considered in two parts. In the first section, corresponding to the first three chapters, I describe and analyse the social relations of *pobladores* and the way in which they build the politics of everyday life within the *población*. Chapter 3, in which I delve into the characteristics of one particular group – the communists – serves as a link with the second part, composed of the following three chapters. These last chapters are about the groups of *pobladores políticos* in the past as well as in the present.

Chapter 1 begins by showing how, under a dynamic of permanent and omnipresent gossip, *pobladores* can be viewed as totally transparent to each other. This means that real life relations between them cannot be instrumental and are considered to be based only on affection. The lack of instrumentality leads *pobladores* to understand the relationships they have with their families, friends or neighbours, as established once and forever, that is, as somehow immutable. However, this chapter presents different ethnographic descriptions that show that *pobladores* lives go through multiple activations and deactivations of relations (normally hinged by betrayals). In order to address this apparent contradiction, the chapter ends by suggesting that relations are at the same time very intense and can also change because affection has a sacrificial dimension that is contested through everyday performances. As an example of this I describe my own experiences activating different relations of kinship and friendship during my fieldwork.

In Chapter 2, I address the limits *pobladores* have for establishing their social relationships. While, in the *población*, affection is the only expectable defining element of social relations, it is also considered as something 'limited'. This means that each person has a limited amount of affection to give to others, leading to its distribution – and concentration – amongst only a few others. This view, evident in much of the gossip that I heard in the field, explains the intensity of relations, as much as the inability of *pobladores* to build new relations without breaking old ones (betrayals). The *población* is therefore deeply fragmented, full of groups with intense internal affection while separated from other groups by indifference, dislike and resentment. In the last part of this chapter, I show that reports of this fragmentation in

the *población* may also be found in the historic moments of union and solidarity amongst *pobladores* (during the *toma* and the struggle against dictatorship).

As I have mentioned before, in Chapter 3 I describe the basis that sustains one of the most important groups in the *población* – because of the historic role it has played at different moments – the communists. From my experience living and politically working with them, I show that being a communist in the *población* is not based so much on a particular ideology as in the strong kinship and friendship bonds that have developed between them. Due to this, I view communism as a moral force that impacts *pobladores*, directing their distinctions, opinions and actions. The sustained presence of militant groups and activists in the *población* may be understood because the two central elements of militancy in the party – discipline and unity of action – are also the central building blocks that direct more generally the existence of relations and groups in the *población*. Finally, I highlight how communist *pobladores* have a substantial difference from the institutional party in the idea that they view themselves as a part and also as the whole of the party at the same time.

Chapter 4 takes on a historic perspective where I analyse, from *pobladores*' current accounts, the main events experienced in the *población* over the 1980s. Although *pobladores* indicate that political struggle was an answer to the repression experienced, I suggest that the ample and all-encompassing mobilization of *pobladores* in La Victoria was much more than just a reaction – in fact that many other repressed *poblaciones* participated very little or not at all in the process (Schneider 1995). This argument, built upon the notion from *pobladores políticos* themselves that they were the ones who were responsible for the cycle of protests, suggests that political groups, particularly of young people, altered their own ethical convictions by embarking on armed struggle. Through highly visible armed actions, these *pobladores* emerged as sacrificing themselves for the good of the *población* – gaining, in their own words, control over their own lives – leading to a change or displacement of the ethical frameworks of other *pobladores*. Only through this displacement can we begin to understand how very different groups – from a very heterogeneous *población* – were able to come together in the same struggle.

Chapter 5 is the continuation of the historic narration from the previous chapter. In this chapter, I describe the current situation of *pobladores políticos*, and their overall perception that nothing they can do could change a world that was created by others. In this context, while most *pobladores* have retired from political activity, waiting for the conditions to change, others – the active ones, with whom I lived and worked – believe that if they do nothing in the present that change will never come. However, the latter also do not believe that their actions will change the current state of things, so they experience politics in an unconscious, inconstant and contradictory way (like a tragedy, an inevitable step towards a certain defeat). These *pobladores* are stuck in a particular historic moment (1990) and wondering which path to follow now that the dictatorship does not exist, which is why they are unable to make transcendental politics that changes the world.

Finally, Chapter 6 takes up an idea already explored in Chapter 4 – the ability of *pobladores políticos* to displace the ethical frameworks of others – to ponder the possibilities of current *pobladores* to achieve collective action. Through the analysis of characters such as Michelle Bachelet and Pierre Dubois,[15] I show that certain figures are able to receive affection from everyone at the same time – without betrayals or disputes – as they have the capacity of condensing multiple persons within themselves. As these characters are able to have affective relationships with many people, they can modify ethical frameworks trespassing group limits, even on a greater scale. This phenomenon, however, is not exclusive to these particular figures and can also be observed in the daily life of the *población*. Through various ethnographic descriptions, I argue that the action of *pobladores políticos* produces similar effects of condensation, although they are temporary and limited to smaller groups of people. My perception is that these relations do not transcend because they lack a narrative, and they do not invoke any current shared experience.

[15] Pierre Dubois was a Catholic priest that lived in La Victoria during the struggle against dictatorship (1983-1987). Due to his relevant participation in those events, he is today widely respected and loved within the *población*.

## Chapter 1: Affective bonds in a transparent social world

A week before I left Chile and *población* La Victoria, my host family and my friends organized a farewell party in my honour. Almost 30 people – mostly friends from the organization in which I participated and some from the street section (*pasaje* or *cuadra)* in which I lived – came to Amanda and Manuel's house at night to participate in a barbecue, the typical celebration activity in Chile.[16] Everyone was happy, making jokes, chatting, taking photos to capture the moment. After at least 3 hours of meat preparation and informal conversation we sat at a long table to share the dinner. Before eating, however, there was the inevitable moment of the toast. Several of my friends gave speeches, remembering the moment we had met and other funny situations in which we were involved, telling how during my time there I had become part of their lives, expressing their feelings openly about how sad they were about me leaving. Rapidly, the atmosphere became highly emotional and intense, especially when Amanda started to cry in her speech. At his turn, one of my best friends, Ernesto, said 'during this year you became one of my major points of support. I am going to miss you so much next year'.

Besides remembering our shared experiences, several speeches discussed the nature of my stay in the *población*. Because La Victoria is one of the most famous *poblaciones* in Santiago as it is considered the first successful organized land seizure (*toma de terrenos*) in Chilean history (1957), and because of the prominence it had within the protest movement against dictatorship during the 1980s, *pobladores* have met at different times several researchers from diverse disciplines who have approached the *población* looking for information. 'They normally come to La Victoria asking for help, conducting interviews, etc., but all of them disappear afterwards. We never see them again. But your case is different, you are our friend. You are going to come back.', said Claudio. 'And if you do not come back, we are going to get you wherever you are', Ernesto joked. I rounded up the toasting time thanking them for their words

[16] *Pasaje* is the Chilean colloquial term for little street, although people from La Victoria used the word *cuadra* (block) to refer to the section of the *pasaje* where a house was located.

and the moments we lived together, emotively expressing – almost crying – that my time there was fantastic and that it had changed my life.

This final scene of fieldwork portrays the closeness and the strong sentimental bonds that I developed with some *pobladores* – my host family, my friends – during my time in La Victoria. This closeness, as we will see throughout this chapter, far from being related to my abilities as ethnographer or to any special feature of their personalities, was an inevitable and more general condition of social relationships in the *población*. In fact, the highly emotional atmosphere of my farewell party replicated many other important events that I lived through with friends and family: when someone was about to travel, when that person or someone else returned, when we helped someone who was having a difficult time, when we celebrated a collective or personal success, on someone's birthday, or at Christmas. Beyond these events, in everyday life they also expressed their strong feelings between them and towards me, either in an implicit or explicit way. Implicitly, in countless scenes of kindness, care, concern, support, readiness, understanding, involvement and commitment that people perform daily for each other. Explicitly, in verbal statements of affection and commitment, or in hugs and other affective physical contact exerted between them. After 14 months of fieldwork, I have no doubt that the same kind of strong sentimental bonds can be found everywhere in the *población* and in other Chilean *poblaciones* (Han 2012, Murphy 2015, Ruiz 2012), representing the fundamental feature of conviviality among *pobladores.*

Drawing on Granovetter´s 'The Strengh of Weak Ties' (1973), Chilean sociologist Vicente Espinoza has also noted *pobladores'* strong bonds, emphasizing the political and social problems of integration that this kind of relationships leads to. According to him:

> Communities with strong ties are in fact small homogeneous circles closely linked on the inside, but with scarce connection towards other spheres, even to other circles within the same *población*… The construction of strong ties with other people reduces the possibility of broadening the number and variety of social contacts. Weak ties, on the contrary, allow people to keep a greater and more varied number of contacts (Espinoza 1993: 18).

While acknowledging strong ties as a characteristic of *poblaciones* in Chile, behind Espinoza´s argument lies a more general representation regarding *pobladores'* lack of integration, social fragmentation, individualism, alienation and marginality, a perspective that has a long history among researchers of Chilean popular sectors (Tironi 1987, Vekemans and Venegas 1966). This representation has been reinforced by those authors who discuss the effects of neoliberal policies implemented during dictatorship and maintained after 1990, which has increased economic deprivation, insecurity, violence, drug consumption and traffic, further degrading the moral and social fabric of poor neighbourhoods. Analysing the path and current condition of these neighbourhoods in different countries, Wacquant (2008) has called this phenomenon 'advance marginality'. In Chile, this representation appears also related to incredibly low levels of interpersonal trust and the high and always increasing sensation of insecurity among Chileans, documented consistently by surveys and other research since the 1990s (Lagos 2001, Lapop 2006, Latinobarómetro 2008, Lechner 2002, Olavarría 2006, PNUD 2002). Thus, for most Chileans, *poblaciones* are considered spaces of poverty, misery, crime and violence, a view that has historically stigmatized those who dwell in them (Murphy, 2015).

Without denying the devastating effects of neoliberal policies and the pervasiveness of drug addiction and mental illness among *pobladores*, anthropologist Clara Han has convincingly shown how intense relationships with kin, friends and neighbours are articulated by *pobladores* in everyday life to mitigate critical moments of economic scarcity. Moreover, she has also described how *pobladores* care for mentally ill and addicted kin within the domestic space, revealing their desires and expectations to be infinitely responsive to them (Han 2012). In short, Han's ethnographic research has allowed her to penetrate into *pobladores* actual lives – beyond statistics and stigmatizing perceptions – to subvert the discourse of social degradation by displaying numerous scenes of care and affection between them.

Living in La Victoria, as I have already mentioned, I was able not only to observe these affective scenes, but also to personally experience strong sentimental bonds with some *pobladores*. In the process, I came to realize that while social relationships allow *pobladores* to moderate structural impacts and to have a better life, they also have

other more permanent and all-encompassing effects. In brief, due to the intensity of ties and their pervasiveness in *pobladores'* lives, social relationships are better understood as emotive forces that imprint ethical frameworks on persons allowing them to move and decide in an always uncertain daily life. Thus, every person in the *población* not only intimately shares their life and is embedded in relationships with the other, but also is shaped by and shapes the other. Social relationships can be seen, therefore, as immanent and tacit 'commitments of unity' under which people are expected to judge, decide and act in everyday life.

The idea that persons are in fact composed by social relations – or that relations are 'intrinsic' to persons – has been argued by several anthropologists and widely documented in numerous ethnographic cases (Carsten 2004, Sahlins 2011, Strathern 1988). However, what seems to be particular in the *población* is the way in which this social construction of persons is daily achieved and the historical and contingent effects of social relations in *pobladores'* personal and common paths. Precisely, my argument in this chapter will be that high intensity relationships among *pobladores* derive from a widespread and immanent conception that understands social relations as purely based on *cariño* (affection).[17] Instrumental or impersonal relationships, based on the interest of one part or both, are simply impossible to conceive within the *población* (between *pobladores*) as people are completely transparent to each other under a regime of ubiquitous and permanent gossip. With this, I do not mean that people are always totally open and that they never have hidden interests in pursuing social relations. Although this is empirically possible, people in the *población* inhabit their ordinary world under the fundamental premise that no one is hiding anything and that all social relations (with kin, friends and neighbours) that exist in a moment of time are the only ones possible. In this sense, relations are 'naturally' given or taken-for-granted in the *población*. In a certain way, this conception of *pobladores'* relations can be seen as ethnographically opposed to Pitt-Rivers' descriptions of Andalucians as experts in the 'art of secrecy' or the doctrine of 'the opacity of other minds',

[17] The word *cariño* is commonly used not only among *pobladores* but in Chile more generally. According to RAE (Spanish Royal Academy of Language) it derives from the Latin word *carere* which means 'lack' or 'nostalgia'. In its everyday use, *cariño* means 'an inclination of love or good affection to someone or something' (RAE, 2017). As this word does not have a direct translation in English I have decided to use the word 'affection' (*afecto*), which has a similar meaning as '*cariño*'.

proposed by Robbins for some societies in Melanesia (Pitt-Rivers 1973, Robbins & Rumsey 2008). Even between those connected by lack of affection, dislike or resentment – also highly sentimental connections – their minds are considered completely transparent to each other as their intentions and purposes can be read in a negative form through gossip (about these relations, see Chapter 2).

I will finally argue that while affection is the only expected link in relations that are commonly considered 'natural' or taken-for-granted in the *población*, affection can be rearticulated many times in a life span, activating and deactivating relations that in each new upgrade will be considered again as given. *Pobladores* move between relationships throughout their lives, awakening to new relational configurations and thus to new selves. Examining finally my own successful experience in making friends and family – successful as it can be portrayed by their perception of me as being not a simple researcher but their kin/friend – I hope to show that activation and deactivation of relations is possible due to the fact that affection has a sacrificial character which is put at stake through everyday performances. While unrewarded acts of kindness, care and expressions of vulnerability towards others are expected to be performed between related people, the suspicion that such acts hide a search for recognition or anything else in return can easily lead to weakening those relationships – and may eventually separate people (Han 2012, Ruiz 2012). Thus, affection appears subject to an everyday substratum that Mayblin (2013) has called 'the untold sacrifice'. Finally, although these unexpected rearticulations of relations have evident effects in biographical trajectories by modifying ethical frameworks for judging, deciding and acting in life, when we move to a collective level we can see that many of them seem to be connected or aligned following historical events experienced in La Victoria and, in some cases, the country. The different stages through which the *población* has passed in its history can be read then in terms of distinct relational configurations and therefore of the pre-eminence of particular ethical frameworks or moral economies. Nowadays, when a discourse has become preponderant of *poblaciones* as spaces of moral and social degradation, atomization and neoliberal individualism, social life in the *población* appears, to the eye of the direct observer, more connected to a particular relational configuration and its resultant ethical framework than to the alleged disappearance of social ties.

**Gossip and the transparency of other minds**

It was a very warm summer in Santiago (with temperatures over 30 degrees Celsius during the day) and in the afternoons few people could be seen on the streets of the *población.* However, after 6 or 7pm everyone started to go out, filling the streets until midnight. After a couple of weeks of fieldwork I had already learned that most of the social life on my *cuadra* revolved around Cristina's little shop.[18] In front of this shop, most of my neighbours gathered at different times throughout the day with the excuse of buying groceries. However, buying was a secondary activity in this daily routine. People used to go to the shop to talk to Cristina and to share information with other neighbours about the lives of other neighbours who were not present. Normally, these movements occurred several times a day and each time people stayed for a much longer time than they spend properly buying.

During all my fieldwork, I got used to going to the shop a couple of times a day to hear what people were gossiping – although many times I did not known who they were talking about – or sometimes I received this information from Amanda (56) when she did her long visits to the shop.[19] When I asked her about what was the new gossip, she used to say in a funny tone, 'I do not gossip, I inform myself'. This phrase shows the ambiguous and sometimes negative connotation of gossip in the *población*, despite the fact that every *poblador* directly or indirectly participated daily in this fundamental activity. Actually, as I could note and experience for myself, gossip had a pleasant character; people really enjoyed talking about others, telling their stories (especially secrets), judging their actions and determining the position that they would follow in each case. In this sense, I agree with Ruiz (2012) about considering gossip as the most important and central practice in *pobladores'* social life, up to the point that 'to

[18] La Victoria is full of little shops which are commonly owned and managed by a family that also lives in the same place. Although the amount of shops is clearly an excess over the number of *pobladores*, they are mostly used to stabilize family budgets. In some cases, however, people gossip that some shops are used as money laundering sites for the drug gangs. This was not the case for Cristina´s shop.

[19] Amanda was 'the mother' within my host family. She was a schoolteacher and was married to Manuel (53), a construction worker. They had two adult children Bruno (28) and Carolina (27). I came to this family for my fieldwork, through indirect links of my in-law family.

participate in gossip networks means to be part of the community' (Ruiz 2012:8).[20] Some stories will serve to show how gossip moved between neighbours.

Several months before I arrived in the *población*, one of my neighbours, *Señora* (Sra) Manuela, had been abandoned by her husband who left Sra. Manuela and their three children for an affair with a younger woman. From the moment he left, Sra. Manuela did not have any contact with him and did not receive any money. She had to start working in the open market selling *empanadas* and other products that she cooked daily in order to have money to feed her children.[21] The difficult situation that Sra. Manuela was going through had become even worse by the time I started to live in the *población* because her husband suffered a stroke and his new partner abandoned him. Because of the stroke, he lost mobility in his legs and had to move in a wheelchair. Due to the accident, Sra. Manuela forgave him and accepted him in her home again. But in his new condition he was unable to work and Sra. Manuela now had to feed him besides her children.

During the first months of fieldwork, this story among many others was discussed every day by my neighbours who used to add new information and to strongly criticize Sra. Manuela's husband. However, since her husband had abandoned the family, Sra. Manuela no longer participated in everyday gossip as she was very busy working and caring for her children all the time. As we could see and despite her semi-confinement, her private life was deeply known by everyone on the *cuadra*, much as was the case for the rest of the inhabitants.

Another even more reserved neighbour, Pepe, was living a slightly similar situation. His wife had been diagnosed with cancer and despite having a job he had to spend

[20] Ruiz (2012) has also noted in her research on another *población* in Santiago, that the word gossip in Chilean daily language can be translated as *'pelambre'* or the action of *'pelar'*. *'Pelar'* basically means to remove wraps from things (to peel). Therefore, in social connotation, the act of *'pelar'* refers to the action of taking away people´s layers, leaving them socially naked. This common meaning is incredibly accurate of the effect that I intend to describe in this section: gossip allows to make other people transparent.

[21] *Empanada* is probably the most common and traditional food in Chile. It is a pastry filled with chopped or ground meat, onion, boiled egg, olives and raisins which is usually baked or sometimes fried. Other filling versions include cheese alone or cheese with other products (ham, mushrooms, prawns, olives, etc.).

much time taking care of her as they lived by themselves. I was in Cristina's shop when Pepe went to buy some groceries. 'Hi Pepe, how are you, how is Karen?', asked Cristina. 'Well, she has some good days and bad days with this thing of chemotherapy. We are surviving…' Then Pepe thanked Cristina for her concern and left the shop faster than most people. The rest of the day, Cristina was dedicated to transmitting this information to most of the neighbours who came to her shop, and probably these neighbours spread it out to their families and friends. I did the same with Amanda and the rest of my family. This was the common path of most gossip in the *población*, although normally the origin of a piece of information was unclear or came from a secondary actor (someone who heard or saw something or was told something by a closely related person, etc.).

The constant and fast circulation of gossip on the *cuadra* had in many instances positive effects. For example, although Amanda and others used to help Sra. Manuela by buying the food she sold, one day several neighbours – including Amanda and myself – organized to bring a bigger help to those who were going through difficult times. Thus, most residents of the *cuadra* donated non-perishable food and we distributed the groceries between two boxes. Next we went to deliver one box to Pepe and the other to Sra. Manuela. While Pepe only received us at his front door, Sra. Manuela let us inside her home. As I did not know her so well – except that I indirectly knew all her life – this was the only time that I entered her house. The vision of her home was a little chaotic. She was cooking their food to sell in the market while at the same time she was cleaning her house and trying to keep her children in order. Meanwhile, her husband was sitting in his wheelchair just watching television in the living room. When we told her that we were delivering groceries that neighbours had donated to help her, she started to cry, thanking us for our kindness and saying that the groceries were more than welcome in this difficult time. When we left her house, Amanda told me, 'Did you realize? She is so hard working and sacrificed but she made a horrible mistake letting her husband come back to the house. He not only betrayed her but is so useless too'. Next day, Amanda went to Cristina's shop to tell her and other neighbours the information she had collected on this visit. This daily and usually unrecognized kindness or solidarity between neighbours – which is also vividly

described by Han (2012) – is only possible because of the permanent and widespread action of gossip through which people can access deeply into other neighbours' lives.

But gossip also serves to reach and get to know those people with whom you are not related or from whom you have cut relationships in the past. Most of the time, gossip only reaffirms the distances and differences that separate people as they speak about the other in bad or condemnatory terms. The best example on my *cuadra* was Ruben´s gang. This group was composed of several men and young guys who used to spend all day, every day outside Ruben´s house looking at each other, chatting at times, smoking drugs every so often – usually pressed hashish and crack –, yelling to each other, laughing out loud, planning illegal activities, selling and buying drugs and, at night, having parties in Jaime and Beto's house (two old alcoholic neighbours from the *cuadra* who lived in a house next to Ruben). Although to greet people was a basic everyday practice in the *población*, my host family and their friends actively ignored every member of Ruben´s gang and almost all the members of their families. Amanda went even further, and in the few occasions when she had to interact with them, her face showed a mix between disgust and contempt. Since my arrival, it was clear for me that I should and could never talk to them, that these relations were forbidden due to my family and my relations on the *cuadra*. Nevertheless, this strong separation did not imply a lack of knowledge or an opacity regarding the lives of gang members. On the contrary, Amanda and her neighbours knew all about them, their life trajectories, their family problems, their secrets, the illegal activities of the gang, etc. But the same happened the other way around. The next story will serve to exemplify this point and to show the extreme fluidity of gossip.

A couple of months after I started to live in La Victoria, my neighbours arranged a meeting to discuss some problems in the *cuadra*. Probably as an effect of the permanent gossip, neighbours were clear and totally agreed about these problems. However, they needed a formal instance to produce a collective solution to them. The *pobladores* saw three main problems: a) the high speed at which cars passed at night through the *cuadra*. For this they decided to make money, by cooking and selling lunches, organising bingos, and other activities, in order to buy and install speed bumps on the street; b) the difficult economic situation of some neighbours, especially Sra.

Manuela and Pepe, for whom they organized a food collection as we saw; c) the excessive noise that emanates from the evangelic church located on the *cuadra* during its services and from Jaime and Beto´s house where Ruben´s gang organized parties at night during the week. This last problem was probably the most difficult to solve as it implied a direct conflict with two groups that were not present at that moment. Neighbours concluded that the best path to follow was sending a diplomatic commission – five or six people including Amanda and Manuel – to kindly speak with the church´s minister and with Beto in order to communicate them the issue.

The following Monday afternoon, the commission gathered in front of Cristina's shop and headed towards the church – I went along with them. They started asking for the minister and speaking with some members who reacted angrily and unwilling to listen. Two minutes later, the minister appeared on the street and calmed the members of his congregation. Contrarily to them, the minister was peaceful and listened carefully to the neighbours. He agreed with them regarding the noise and promised to lower the volume of the equipment during services.

After saying goodbye to the minister, the neighbours walked to Jaime and Beto´s house. As usual, Beto was outside his house sitting in a chair and around him there were several members of Ruben's gang, including Ruben himself. Probably through gossip, they already knew about the commission and the visit, and they were waiting for us. Manuel started saying that they were there representing the neighbours who had complained about the noise when they organized parties at night during the week. He tried to make it clear that this behaviour especially bothered those who had to work very early in the next morning, and therefore, that parties during the weekend were fine. Although the whole time Manuel was talking to Beto, it was clear that the conflict was actually with Ruben. It was Ruben who answered violently saying that as he did not mess with anyone, people should not be bothering him now; that Beto could do as many parties as he wanted because it was his house – although they were actually Ruben´s parties –; that those who had complained were the same *viejas* (old women) that are always gossiping; that people were messing with his work but he should only be worried about feeding his family, etc.

The situation became tense. Amanda intervened in the conversation saying that the problem was with Beto – ignoring Ruben – explaining to him that his parties had to be stopped because she and many other neighbours had problems getting to sleep at night when they had parties. She said 'we live in a community, very close to each other. The least we must do is keep respect between neighbours'. The rest of the conversation continued in these terms, while Ruben was becoming more and more upset. When the conflict was about to get out of control, one of the members of Ruben's gang, '*el flaco*' (the thin guy), started to talk: 'Sra. Amanda, you are different from us. You bring *universitarios* [university students] to live with you. Our lives are difficult. We would never find a job because of our *antecedentes* [police record]. What we do during the day and sometimes at night is our work. But we understand and will reduce the noise at night'. This intervention was the end of the conversation as the message the commission wanted to transmit was finally accepted by someone. During all the time Beto never spoke. Fifteen minutes later I was in front of Cristina's shop when Ruben's sister-in-law – who lived in Ruben's house – showed up telling everyone what Ruben had done and said when he returned to his house after the conversation. He was totally upset, like mad, yelling that people do not know what he was capable of, threatening some neighbours. She finalized saying, 'but do not worry, you know Ruben, he is *pura boca* [he is just talk]. He is going to calm down and will not do anything else'.

This story is illustrative of the fluidity and speed of information when moving between neighbours, in a way that it reaches everyone almost instantly. But it also shows how people know about others with whom they are not directly related. Thus, when '*el flaco*' mentioned 'university students' in the meeting with the neighbours he was clearly referring to me even though during my time in the *población* we never spoke to each other directly – and he was also referring to Bruno, Amanda's son. The same can be said of the countless stories and gossip that I heard about people from my *cuadra* and the *población* as a whole – many stories of people whom I never met. Thus, and contrary to its nature based on secrecy, the permanent and widespread gossiping between *pobladores* produces instead an open and transparent social world. Every person in the *población* knows everything about everyone, and therefore *pobladores* live their everyday life under the premise that no one is hiding anything. Even those who tried to keep a distance with the others, who tried to stay outside gossip and

preserved a greater degree of intimacy – such as Pepe for example – were commonly subjects of gossip like everyone else and people usually talked about them in negative terms – as outsider, *arriviste*, social climber or *cuico* (posh). The inevitable condition of knowing other people´s lives is that your own life will be permanently monitored and gossiped about as well.

Besides the pervasiveness of gossiping in *pobladores*' daily life, there is another fundamental condition that makes the transparency of others possible: gossip is always finally taken as true. As Fasano (2009) has shown for an Argentinian *población*, gossip needs to be told in a social context that interprets it as something highly possible, if not directly true. According to Fasano, as gossip is most of the time collective and anonymous, the criterion for evaluating its veracity is not its origin (who said X in the first place) or any objective evidence but its suitability to what people think or believe (Fasano et al. 2009). For example, once I was talking with Amanda and Manuel regarding Ruben´s gang. I said, 'I don't think they are a drug gang. I have never seen them selling drugs or new people or cars permanently passing by Ruben's house. I am not sure if they are a proper gang or just people who gather together without a clear purpose. Instead, they are usually consuming drugs and I have heard them talking about selling stolen merchandise a couple of times but never drugs'. Amanda and Manuel looked at me as if I did not know anything of life. Manuel answered, 'They are a drug gang. We know that. This is how Cristian started. If not, how can they live? Everyone knows that they are selling drugs'.[22]

As we can see, against my direct perception and evidence, they continued believing that they were a gang because it was something that 'everyone knows' as it was commonly talked about in gossip – and they mentioned a couple of them as indisputable proofs. In some situations – specifically when gossip involved close people (friends or family) or it was highly unbelievable – *pobladores* could oppose gossip and intend to discard it. Many times, however, the power of gossip as a likely truth ended up corroding beliefs about others and even breaking strong and long-lasting relationships (events that I called betrayals – for some examples on this see

[22] Cristian was a former and famous drug dealer that used to live on the *cuadra*. He was arrested several years before my fieldwork date and was sentenced to prison for many years.

Chapter 2). These 'negative' effects of gossip contrast with Gluckman's (1963) classic proposal of gossip understood as a practice that reinforces community norms and maintains unity. Discussing the role that gossip plays in witchcraft accusations, Steward and Strathern (2004) see positive and negative effects of gossip as an expression of its ambiguous and ambivalent character.

Beyond the discussion of its different effects and functions, in this section I have stressed the role that the constant and widespread action of gossiping, in which all *pobladores* participate daily, plays in producing the perception of a transparent social world, a world in which everyone knows everything about others (their life trajectories, their secrets, their opinions, etc.). Exploring this idea I am aware that the opposite could be a possibility – that constant gossip could produce the notion that you will never get to know others completely, and that, eventually, new gossip will reveal the true nature of a person you trust. This idea implied a world of profound distrust in which betrayals are not disruptive but expected. However, as we saw, the potency of gossip lies in its ambivalence, namely, in its capability to bring some people closer and to separate others – solidarity and rejection. These effects would be impossible in such a distrustful world. Moreover, gossip is lived in the temporality of an up-to-date permanent present: past betrayals always appeared in people´s stories as terrible but inevitable transgressions or disruptions while future betrayals are never considered as possibilities until new gossip carries an actualization about the others.

Therefore, in a world in which everyone knows everything about other people and then it is possible to totally trust in some, effective relationships between *pobladores* are characterized by reciprocal and unconstrained sentiments or, in other words, they are primarily based on affection (*cariño*). Any form of instrumentality or calculation in the constitution of relationships is discarded as other intentions would become known between transparent people. Thus, the links between kin, friends and even neighbours are understood by *pobladores* as eminently personal and sentimental. High intensity relationships that I saw everywhere in the *población* and experienced personally with some *pobladores* – some examples were already described, others will be exposed in next sections – derive from the possibility provided by gossip to know other people´s minds and therefore to entirely trust and become attached to others. However, this

conception as I have exposed it up to this point may seem highly rational and voluntarily conducted by *pobladores*. Instead, *pobladores* consider that there is no rational explanation behind their relationships and that they are 'naturally given' – relationships cannot be chosen. Knowledge, trust, sentiment and attachment occur, in fact, simultaneously and therefore they must be understood as parts of an analytical dissection of the way that social relationships are experienced daily in the *población*. In the next section I will further explore the kinds of relationships that I found in La Victoria and how they share a notion of predetermination and inevitability that contrasts with *pobladores'* actual changes in relationships throughout their lives.

**Kin, friends and neighbours**

The transparency effect that gossip produces in the *población* is certainly amplified by some historical particularities of La Victoria and especially by the actual dimension of the social space in which its *pobladores* move daily. On the one hand, a large majority of La Victoria´s inhabitants have lived all their lives in the *población*. Most of those who participated in the *toma* (the founders) never left the *población* and their families grew and expanded through the years, occupying the same house, building extensions or new houses on the original site, or moving to other houses nearby. New generations have grown up together in the *población*, have formed groups of friends and organizations, have married each other and, although some have had to leave due to lack of space, many have stayed in La Victoria, even in the same *cuadra* where the rest of the family lives – as is the case for Amanda, for example. Thus, there has historically been low mobility in the *población*. Although this has been changing over recent years due to the fact that many of the current young adult generation have left the *población* to live in middle class *villas* or flats in the city centre, thereby leaving space for new people, particularly immigrants, there is still a large majority of *pobladores* that belongs to the traditional families. In short, people and families have known and identified with each other for a long time and therefore gossip has become more refined, specialized, enhanced and deep throughout the years.

On the other hand, after a couple of months living in the *población*, I realized that people´s everyday movements were very limited and the space of social life was quite small. For example, most of my neighbours hardly ever left the *pasaje* or *cuadra*,

except if they needed to buy something not available in the stores located on the *cuadra* (like fresh bread or meat), when they went to the *feria* (street market), or if they had to go to another part of the city – especially those few who had formal or conventional jobs. In other words, social life mostly occurred on the street section in front of the house (*cuadra*) and everyday social interactions were circumscribed to the neighbours, friends and family within this space. During my walks through La Victoria, it was very uncommon to see my direct neighbours in another part of the *población* and the few with active relationships outside the *cuadra* were those who participated in organizations – such as Sra. Laura who assisted to an evangelical church – or those who had family in another *cuadra* – such as Manuel. Therefore, gossip was not only inevitably concerned with people from the same families that have lived since the foundation in the *población*, but also commonly was circumscribed to the people from the same *cuadra*, although neighbours used to gossip about some famous people of the *población* as well.

In such a transparent and bounded world, it was expectable that one of my first impressions when I arrived in the field was related to a certain immobility of social life. Social relations seemed to have been determined once and for all a long time ago, and then the image of the *población* in terms of persons and groups of kin, friends and neighbours was perceived as permanent as if this order of relationships was the only one possible. This impression was also shared with *pobladores* themselves, who suggested to me many times that they were not able to choose family, friends and even neighbours, thus conceiving their relationships as 'natural' or taken-for-granted. For them, relatives were considered as such from birth (biological), friends were those with whom they had grown up and neighbours were just the other unchosen people that lived near their houses (on their respective *cuadra*). In a certain way, this widespread position is consubstantial with the notion of relationships as mainly based on affection: feelings between people are understood as emerging spontaneously, without an act of volition. However, as we saw, affection is not given randomly to anyone but follows a social grammar eminently articulated by gossip. Through several examples, in what follows I will show that while *pobladores* understand the three basic forms of relationships (kin, friends, neighbours) as different modes, they are all considered naturally fixed, not a product of will. This perception contrasts with *pobladores'* life

trajectories in which it is possible to see that they have passed by several events of activation and deactivation of relations. Moreover, I will also show the existence of current relations that seem to challenge the notion of predetermined relations, opening a fundamental enigma over personhood in the *población* that I will try to solve by the end of the section.

Once, I was talking to a friend, Inés (52), regarding the problem of drugs and drug dealing in the *población*. A couple of days before, a shop in the *población* – where I sometimes used to buy bread – had been raided by the police and several members of the family that owned the shop had been arrested. News of the event spread quickly throughout La Victoria. About the incident, Inés told me, 'I know they are honest people, but everyone knows that Felipe [the oldest son] is involved in traffic'. Then, in a sort of epiphany, she said, 'you know, this is why the problem of trafficking is so complex and we cannot stop them [the drug gangs]. They are not like random people; they are our families, brothers and sons. Everyone has someone in the family *metido en el tráfico* [involved in traffic]'. In that occasion I remember I found her explanation really plausible as kinship appeared even to me as the strongest barrier to an activity that the vast majority of *pobladores* rejected. Thus, behind her words, she was making explicit the shared notion that kin was the most important, immediate and sentimental of all kind of relations. Illustrating this notion, *pobladores* used to use daily phrases such as 'family is family' and the more explicit 'you do not choose family; you have to accept what you got'. The strength of family ties in *poblaciones* and more generally in the Chilean popular sectors has been highlighted by several studies – historical, sociological and anthropological – especially the connection between mother and siblings (Espinoza 1993, Montecinos 2010, Salazar 2006, Valdes 1988). Paradoxically, as we will see later, kinship is not always inevitable and can in fact be deactivated under some circumstances.

The importance of kin in the *población* can be simply portrayed by two different everyday features. Firstly, as most of original families never left the *población* and instead reproduced and expanded through the years, many *pobladores* could be located by their kin connection with a better-known person – as son/daughter of, sister/brother of, etc. Thus, the spatial proximity between relatives has not only been a key factor, in

my opinion, in maintaining everyday interactions necessary to strengthen bonds, but also it has allowed people to be identified according to the family they belong to. Again, gossip has been the main instrument for knowing, keeping and actualizing these connections.

Secondly, as *pobladores* consider kinship a biological product and therefore every person appears automatically and unwittingly embedded in a particular blood net – that allows people to identify and locate each other – this automaticity and non-intentionality transforms kinship into the most suitable ground for affection. In other words, the spontaneity and disinterest that affection presupposes is especially fulfilled by an automatic connection such as kinship, which becomes in this sense the basic model for the other forms of relations. This transformation not only can be seen in the 'naturalization' that operates in other relational modes – the main argument of this section – but also in the way that people perhaps contradictorily expand in practice their definitions of kin beyond blood connection, through the common use of kin appellatives for those who are especially close. Although it is quite common everywhere in Chile to hear close people calling each other brother, uncle/aunt and nephew/niece, among others, in the *población* these appellatives acquire an exceptional extent of reality. The closest example of this was the case of Bruno, the son in my host family. Bruno had met Amanda when he was her student at the school. Due to different circumstances of life and Amanda´s desire to help Bruno, he became close to the family up to the point when he started to live with them. When I met the family at the beginning of my fieldwork, he had lived with them for many years and was indisputably considered part of the family. Amanda called him 'my son' and Bruno called her 'mum'. The rest of the family (Manuel and Carolina) called him by his name and vice-versa, though for them he was also considered kin. At the end of my fieldwork, Amanda also introduced me to other people as her 'putative son' to imply our closeness but also to differentiate Bruno´s condition as a proper son (about my difficult relation with Bruno see Chapter 2).

Perhaps Bruno´s example might make it seem that as a result of this transfiguration between blood and affection the limits of kinship would be somehow related to the domestic space, living together in the same house and/or sharing food (Carsten 1995).

Although these are exceptional conditions to reach high levels of intimacy and affection, they are not always necessary and the use of kin appellatives between people who did not share the same home was very common in the *población*. Probably the most typical case – among several others – that I saw everywhere was the use of uncle/aunt to refer to parents' friends. Amanda, for example, called Sergio Mori, a friend of her mother, 'uncle' and Carolina called Amanda's friends, 'aunts' (see Chapter 3 for Amanda's family history and the importance of Uncle Sergio on it).

In my opinion, kinship elasticity and the use of kin appellatives beyond the domestic space are both highly connected with the diffuse line that separates public and private spheres in the *población* (which is also noted by Ruiz 2012). This can be seen in multiple aspects of everyday life. I have already mentioned how gossip circulation makes people's private lives public. Moreover, the common practice of wall painting which is possible to observe everywhere in the *población* is a clear expression of the 'public' use of 'private' property (walls). On the contrary, people use the 'public space' – the streets – as extensions of their houses, spending a huge part of their lives chatting, buying, working and moving around in them. The way that people walk directly on the streets of the *población* – not the pavements – or the common action of closing the *cuadra* for semi-public or even private activities (e.g. a child's birthday, a music show, a family lunch, etc.) are quite common and unquestioned behaviours that also challenge the boundaries between public and private space. In my opinion, this aspect of *pobladores*' conviviality seems to point towards the idea that kinship is not reduced to inhabiting the same house but to the social proximity in terms of affection that people experience in everyday life. A similar conclusion has been reached by Rodgers (2010) in his study over how kin appellatives are used to emphasize the extent of closeness between friends in Mozambique.

The transfiguration of blood into affection and the unbounded condition of houses can be also exemplified in the opposite situations, when relatives become unrelated. One of my friends in the *población*, Claudio, told me the story of what he considered to be one of the most difficult situations he had had to face in his life. In the context of his wife's pregnancy – many years ago – his brother had implied in a family conversation that Claudio was not the father of the future child. When Claudio had confronted his

brother, the latter had used bad words to refer to Claudio´s wife: 'I was totally upset, I wanted to kill him. I told him that I would never talk to him anymore and until now, after many years, there is no relation between us'. At this point of the story I noted to him that although he said there was no relation he was still calling him 'brother'. He said: 'Well, I call him "brother" because we have the same parents, but he is not my brother anymore. He offended my wife!'. Conflicts between relatives, as we can imagine, are very common in the *población*, although most of the time the rest of the family mobilize their affective resources to reattach the relationships. However, as in Claudio's case, relationships cannot always be pulled back together. During fieldwork, I heard many stories of terrible and apparently definitive divisions between kin, and people always fell into the same paradox: they were still considered nominally kin because of blood but, more importantly, no longer kin by heart – by feelings. These stories of unrelated kin and not blood relatives show in my opinion that while people commonly define kin in biological terms, some personal events can modify kin limits without contradiction to this shared definition, as the final marker for kin is affection. This 'predetermined' conception of relationships that can be altered by special events is even clearer when we move to friendship.


Figure 1-1: Street that was closed for a neighbours' *once*. To the left, the Catholic church with mural of André Jarlan (author's photo)

While anthropologists have been very much concentrated on dismantling the natural-biological presumption of kinship in Western thought, less attention has been placed on friendship, a terrain normally considered to be based on personal affinity and voluntary identification between the participants (Sahlins 2011). In La Victoria, however, most *pobladores* consider friends to be as taken-for-granted as relatives. I noticed this fundamental belief for the first time in the field when I was in a conversation with Manuel. Unlike most young people in the *población*, Carolina had grown apart from the rest of her peers after Amanda made the decision in the mid-1990s to separate her from her friends when she was a child. According to Amanda, the *población* was becoming too dangerous and Carolina´s friends were moving too quickly into adulthood. The decision was completely effective and had a major impact on Carolina´s life: she was isolated from the *población*, preventing her from constructing her own network of friends. From then on, all of Carolina's friends came from her school and later, from the university. As we can expect, Amanda's decision was not unique: other families also made the same decision, opening an unbridgeable gap between generations. This gap became evident to me in a conversation with Manuel regarding Carolina's current friends (that Amanda and I considered different from her and did not like them). He said: 'it is not supposed that we have to like them. She likes them, this is the only important thing'. I replied, 'Ok, but your friends are from here, very similar to you'. And he finally responded, 'In my times, we did not have the opportunity of selecting friends. I did not choose my friends, they were just the guys who were there and grew up with me'.

During the farewell party that my friends and my host family organized in my honour, Antonio, who was the only new member besides me of the cultural organization in which I participated during fieldwork, told me in a confident tone, 'becoming part of this group was completely unexpected and a kind of salvation for me. I was tired of interacting with my friends from my *cuadra* day-after-day. Now I know that I needed an escape from them'. As in Manuel's words, what Antonio was making explicit – in a rather negative voice – was the ordinary assumption in the *población* that friends cannot be chosen, that friends are those who are there near to you, spending their lives with you. Most of the time this notion remains implicit in relationships and it only becomes evident when people sometimes talk about the devastating effects that a

betrayal of a former friend had in his/her life (some stories of betrayals in Chapter 2). Moreover, I could say that during my time in the *población* I never saw any of my friends or even a random person trying actively to be friends with other people. In fact, someone interested in making friends would have been immediately considered a highly suspicious person. Thus, when my friends used to find me with other people or I told them that I would go to a meeting with a different organization, they always reacted suspicious of my behaviour even when they knew that these activities were necessary for my research. And when I tried to approach other people, as soon as I showed them an excessive interest, they reacted with distrust and distance – the same happened with my friends at the beginning but everything changed after an event that I will describe in the next section. In short, friendship in the *población* is not something that can be made, it is something that happens.

Certainly, this assumption of friendship as predetermined is highly moulded by the same features of conviviality that I have already mentioned for kinship. In a context of deep knowledge about the other through the fast and widespread circulation of gossip, of people's low internal and external mobility in the *población*, and lack of boundaries between public and private spheres, friends are as automatic and predetermined as kin in *pobladores'* lives. Thus, friends are also thought of as inevitable or impossible to be chosen because doing so would imply an extent of interest incompatible with the spontaneous affection that is considered a basic condition for related people. Although the transfiguration of blood into affection that we saw in kinship is unnecessary in this case, what friendship reveals in its pure state is that, in fact, all relationships presuppose an extent of affection to be considered such a thing. Antonio's words are a good example of this as he had suddenly found himself interested in different matters to his friends – matters that he could find in our cultural centre. However, he still considered the guys from his *cuadra* as his friends.

Another good example of the way that friendship presupposes affection – the pure feeling with no other intentions – is several pieces of gossip that I heard about Claudina Nuñez (60). She is a communist politician and famous *pobladora* from La Victoria who was the mayor of PAC (Pedro Aguirre Cerda district, where La Victoria is located) during my time in the field. Many people used to frequently gossip that

Claudina had hired several people from La Victoria – friends and family especially – for high positions in the council, a highly-expected behaviour for a *poblador* but condemnable for an authority figure. Moreover, neighbours gossiped particularly about those people who had been employed by Claudina and were considered to be close to her only because of the privileges of her power. People commonly said, '*ellos son unos interesados'* (they are interested people) or '*ellos no son verdaderos amigos'* (they are not true friends). Although several of my friends were also hired in minor positions within the council due to the fact that they belonged to the Communist Party, like Claudina, at some point I realized that most of them tried actively to avoid her in order not to appear as 'interested people'. After hearing several of Claudina´s speeches throughout my fieldwork, in my opinion the gossip about the people who surrounded her was also believed by Claudina herself. Thus, in her speeches she always transmitted a kind of sadness because of the loneliness that she found herself in due to her position that was incompatible with *pobladores* relations – this is a supposition that we shared among my friends but I never confirmed directly with her.

As Killick and Desai (2010) have pointed out, most scholars have considered that affection and unconstrained sentiments are universal conditions of friendship. This has been documented in several ethnographic studies such as those conducted by Papataxiarchis (1991) and Pitt-Rivers (1973). However, others such as Carrier (1999) have noted that such sentiments need an individual or autonomous self that corresponds with the definition of a person in Western thought. Therefore, in other contexts – such as Melanesia for example – where relationships are prior and actually constitute persons, friendship in these terms would not be possible. From my ethnographic experience, friendship in the *población* seems to contradict Carrier's dichotomy as while friends are considered taken-for-granted or inevitable – and therefore not a result of an individual will – they are also thought of as based on unconstrained sentiments. In fact, feelings require automatic and predetermined relationships because otherwise they would not be credible and reliable.

The non-voluntary notion of friendship under which *pobladores* move daily generates relationships at least as strong and intense in terms of affection as kinship. Actually, I could not observe a general pre-eminence of one mode of relationship over the other:

some people were closer to and spent most of their time with friends, other people with their family. Personal trajectories and events (problems, betrayals, support in difficult situations, etc.), and perhaps people's age are important factors in such imbalances. For example, stories of those of my friends who participated in the struggles against the dictatorship when they were younger are full of scenes of friendship, while their families almost completely disappear. However, this situation has changed as many now have their own offspring to care about, though friends and family always appear as affective relations in every moment of life. In this sense, if both friends and family are considered inevitable and predetermined relations and therefore are founded in unconstrained sentiments, why do people establish a difference between these modes of relations (calling some people friends and other kin)? What would the boundary between friends and kin be if both are relations marked by an intense affection?

In my opinion, although there is a high fluidity between both kinds of relations in the *población*, friendship presupposes equality between the participants, as Killick and Desai (2010) have noted for several ethnographic cases. Kinship, on the other hand, is marked by a hierarchy, not in terms of power, but rather related to assuming certain positions or roles accordingly to a family tree. Thus, although gossip over Claudina Nuñez's family and friends as 'interested people' referred to both kinds of relation, people concentrated gossip especially on her friends because of the imbalance produced by Claudina´s power. From my experience, due to the fluidity between friends and family – portrayed by cases when a friend became family and vice-versa – many times what determines the relation is the social context in which people interact.

A good example of this was the case of two of my closest friends in the *población*, Ernesto (19) and Emilio (54), who were part of the cultural organization in which I participated during fieldwork. Emilio was Ernesto´s father and most of the time – even when we met on the street – they treated each other with the respect, courtesy and hierarchy of a father-son relationship. However, during the organization meetings their relation mutated and they became equals. Thus, they behaved accordingly to the context as friends, assuming a horizontal position, talking to each other as with everyone else within the group. And when the meeting was over, they returned to the roles of father and son. Emilio used to ask Ernesto after a meeting 'What are you going

to do? Are you staying or coming with me to the house?' And while Ernesto was thinking, Emilio insisted, 'Come with me, I do not want you to walk alone so late'.

Finally, the last mode of relationships in the *población* is with neighbours (neighbouring). People commonly use *vecino/vecina* (neighbour) to refer to those who live in the same *cuadra* where their house is located or around the space they move daily, excluding family and friends. Therefore, not everyone in the *población* is considered a neighbour for a person, just the people with whom that person has formed a relation founded on living together in everyday life. In this sense, as with kin and friends, neighbours are also understood as predetermined and inevitable, a consequence of sharing the same place to live. Moreover, like the other non-voluntary relations, neighbouring also presupposes an extent of affection, although not as intense and unconstrained as with friends and family. During my time in La Victoria, I could observe countless scenes of solidarity, mutual help and kindness between neighbours like the food collection for Sra. Manuela and Pepe described above. Han (2012) also shows how neighbours from *población* La Pincoya helped each other without expecting anything in return or any kind of recognition. As we saw, this kindness between neighbours is facilitated by gossip, as everyone is able to know what is happening in other people's lives. But also, this openness produces tensions and distrust between some neighbours that could lead to the end of relationships. This was the case for my host family and some of the other neighbours that used to act as if the members of Ruben's gang and part of their families did not exist at all. How can a non-voluntary relationship – as with neighbours – end? Are kinship or friendship inevitable relationships if people can actually activate or deactivate relations?

The cases of Bruno (who became part of my host family) and Claudio (who had deactivated his relationship with his brother) are examples of how kinship is not a predetermined category and it can change through time accordingly to the movements of affection. Likewise, Manuel and Antonio's stories are also exemplary of how the predetermined condition of friendship would seem to be under tension from the multiples changes of friends and/or groups of friends that every *poblador* experiences through life. For Manuel, his friends from the *cuadra* were left behind many years ago, when he entered into a revolutionary armed group at the beginning of the 1980s and

later to the Communist Party (for Manuel´s life story, see chapter 3). For Antonio, his friends were still there in his *cuadra* but new relationships had recently been activated and therefore sooner or later he would have to follow one group or the other (this actually happened some months after I left the field). How should we understand this notion of predetermined and non-voluntary relations if the life trajectory of every *poblador* is marked by numerous moments of activation and deactivation of relationships? This enigma was one of the most intriguing ones during my fieldwork as it not only implied two opposed notions regarding personhood in the *población* – one in which relationships are prior to persons, the other in which persons produce relations – but also because it involved a problem for my own work as I, an outsider ethnographer, had to become part of the community and establish relationships with *pobladores*. How could I make relationships if these were considered predetermined long ago and I had never been in La Victoria before my fieldwork? How could I establish relationships with *pobladores* if I had a manifest interest – conducting research – and relations are non-voluntary, disinterested and purely based on affection?

In the next section I will answer these questions by describing the events that led me to develop strong bonds with some *pobladores* (my family, my friends). Basically, I will actually show how I could produce and receive affection of my own in the *población*. I consider that my ethnographic experience and the many examples that I have portrayed in this section are irrefutable evidence that relationships between *pobladores* can not only be created and be extinguished but also that they are always changing. However, they are also proof that all these changes and movements do not alter the predetermined and non-voluntary character of relations because this character is a necessity, a basic condition for social relationships in the *población*. Thus, the inevitability and predetermination under which *pobladores* understand their relations do not refer to an objective immutable reality – that relations are actually determined once and for all – quite differently, this notion is an expression of the strength of affection between people. Affection cannot be subject to people´s moods and momentary desires because the resultant bonds would be arbitrary and untrusted. Therefore, affection acts beyond people's will, activating and deactivating relations that were already inscribed in them – those who are kin, friends and neighbours. In

this sense, all the past experiences of betrayals, separations and disagreements are understood as inevitable events or 'awakenings' to reach the current affective relations (which are the only possible ones in each moment of time). As I see it, this notion of affection as beyond people´s will is another way to say that relationships in the *población* are considered prior to persons or, in other words, that due to the intensity of relations in daily life, every person is a result of their current relationships. It is this pre-eminence of relationships, that leads me to argue that they are emotive forces that imprint ethical frameworks on persons allowing movements and decisions in an always uncertain daily life (this argument can be found throughout the thesis but especially in Chapter 3). To solve this enigma we would still need to discuss an important matter: how can affection be created and received in the *población* to form or activate relationships? In the final section of this chapter I will use my experience with *pobladores* to present an answer to this question.

**The sacrificial character of affection**

I arrived in La Victoria on Monday 4th of February 2013 in order to begin my year of fieldwork. I had already been there the previous week, invited by the family that would be my host family, because they wanted to meet me before making a decision on whether to let me live in their house. In that opportunity, we shared an *once* (afternoon tea) while I introduced myself and the kind of work I would do over the year.[23] A couple of hours before the *once,* Amanda met me on the street and invited me to enter her home. We sat on armchairs in the living room and had a conversation that lasted for at least one hour. For me, that conversation showed very important details about Amanda: her honesty, her political commitment, her vocation as a school teacher, her infinite capacity for conversation. Except for the teaching vocation, I found the same characteristics in most of my friends and other *pobladores* that I met over the year. In a kind of inevitable mimetic attitude, when I was talking with her I felt an enormous necessity of being completely open and honest, more than I had prepared myself to be.

[23] *Once* (or elevenses) is the 'evening tea' which is taken as a dinner in most Chilean homes. It consists of bread with something to fill it with (it can be ham, butter, cheese and/or preferably smashed avocado) and a hot drink (a cup of tea or coffee) although some people drink soda. A good *once* always has something sweet to eat at the end (cakes or pastries). The *once* is the most important everyday moment of encounter for Chilean families after a day of work or rest. Some people instead of calling it *once*, refer to this moment as *tomar te* (drinking tea), even if they do not actually drink tea.

Before the meeting, I had decided to keep some parts of my previous life to myself (for example, my last address in Santiago) and also not to become emotionally involved – as far as possible – with anyone in the field in order to preserve an extent of objectivity. Soon, just in this first conversation with Amanda, I was convinced that this approach was impossible, and not just because acting differently could be more useful for my work but because I basically found it impossible to behave in a different way. With the openness that every ethnographer takes to the field, I entered into a dynamic in which the terms of the relationship were completely established by the others. Thus, I suddenly became as transparent as Amanda herself.

After this first conversation with Amanda, the rest of the family started to arrive. Some minutes later, we were all sitting together around the table and it was Manuel, Carolina and Bruno's turn to ask me questions regarding my family, my studies and why I wanted to live in La Victoria. Again, as with Amanda, I felt the same need to answer everything with extreme honesty even if this could imply a problem for my future acceptance. At some point, Bruno asked me the classic question that probably every ethnographer has received in the field, 'Could your research be helpful for La Victoria's *pobladores* or for other *poblaciones*?' With the same honesty as before, I replied, 'I would like to say yes. It could be, but probably not. Not really'. He did not look very happy with my answer.

While this collective interview was going on, we enjoyed the *once* prepared earlier by Amanda. Also from time to time they talked about other topics, laughing and mocking each other. This dynamic helped divert attention from me making the moment friendlier and less stressful. The jokes that I heard there, although I did not know in that moment, were more or less repeated in all the future meals that I shared with the family during my time there. They mocked Amanda's clumsy and boring jokes at which only she laughed and celebrated thunderously; about Manuel's incomprehensive way of talking up to the point that they said he needed subtitles; about Bruno's difficulties in putting away his laptop and his sleep problems; and finally Carolina's laziness. At some point in the conversation I started to make myself a cup of tea. As I do not like very hot drinks, I asked Amanda for cold water to cool my tea. Manuel looked at me for a second and suddenly he and Carolina started to

laugh out loud while Amanda and Bruno smiled, trying not to laugh. Manuel said, 'Is it too hot for you? You are like a little boy'. Surprisingly, although they were laughing at me and I had just met them, my reaction was to laugh with them. I felt that their jokes were innocent, without malice, as if through them they were trying to integrate me into their own dynamic and make me one of them. I replied that I had a certain intolerance to hot drinks, but this made them laugh more. Thinking about this episode now, I have realized that this event was central not only in terms of my temporary acceptance into their home but also in my subsequent inclusion to their family life. Actually, I was making family without knowing. Thus, for the next 14 months of fieldwork I got used to receiving many jokes: regarding my intolerance to hot drinks, my supposed attempts to diet (because I bought a pita bread once) and my supposed dirtiness (because I believe that taking a shower everyday – as most Chileans do – is non-ecological and a waste of water), etc. But after a while I also learnt to mock them too.

When we finished the *once*, Amanda told me more seriously: 'we talked all together and you can stay here for a month while you find a place in the *población* to stay more permanently. We can help you in that task'. Actually she confessed, 'Manuel and I do not have any problem with you staying the time that you want here, but Carolina feels weird sharing her private space with a stranger'. Thus, I arrived the following week in order to begin my fieldwork. In my third day at her house, Amanda approached me again and told me, 'we have talked and we are really happy with your way of being [*forma de ser*]. You are like us. You can stay here with us as long as you want'. Through the year living there, although we never talked in these terms, I considered them as my family and I know that they felt the same, especially Amanda and Manuel. They were always worried about me when I was not around the house and we shared all our life (our thoughts, our feelings, our secrets).

During the first three months of fieldwork, I spent most of my time with my host family. I went where they went and did what they did, like a shadow. Following their activities, I met Amanda´s and Manuel's relatives – who also lived in La Victoria – and some of their friends, the neighbours of the *cuadra* and a few others. I went with Amanda to the *feria* (open street market) on several occasions and I helped Manuel

with his work in construction a couple of times – returning to the house completely exhausted. I also went every day to buy groceries that Amanda needed to cook and I gossiped with my neighbours about other neighbours who were not present in that moment. However, after a while I realized that these relationships were not getting me to other *pobladores* as they were limited to the cuadra and therefore separated from the rest of the *población*. Although afterwards very significant for my work, I had the feeling at that time that this reduced space was limiting my understanding of the *población´s* political dynamics – the original focus of my research. By the end of the third month I was confused as my research was not moving forward and I was getting bored of the same immobile social life day after day. In short, I felt the necessity to jump the limits of the *cuadra* and make my own network. Luckily, the answer to these inquiries came from a person of my own host family, Manuel.

Since my arrival in the *población*, I had been informed that both Amanda and Manuel, like many other *pobladores*, had been part – in different ways – of the struggle against the dictatorship during the 1980s, in their case as members of the local Communist Party. However, during my time in the *población* only Manuel was currently participating in the only communist cell in La Victoria that was still active – in fact, it was the most numerous non-religious and non-football related formal organization in the *población*[24]. As many *pobladores* and researchers considered that La Victoria´s history has been particularly linked to the Communist Party's political leadership, especially during its foundation and the 1980s mobilizations, I had randomly found in Manuel an entry point to those with whom I most wanted to engage in my research (Cortés 2014, Espinoza 1988, Farias 1989, Garcés 2002, GIMP 2003, GSP 1989, GTLV 2007, Schneider 1995). Moreover, at the end of 2012, Manuel's cell had created a parallel cultural centre as a platform to develop activities for *pobladores* according to their interests (artistic and cultural activities, workshops, etc.). As I was not a communist militant, it seemed to me that it was much easier to engage with this organization format – the cultural centre – and accordingly I asked Manuel to invite me to their meetings. However, he was reluctant and doubtful about my participation

[24]A cell is the base structure of the Communist Party. Several cells form a different structure called *el comunal* (the council committee) which represents the district. Many council committees converge in *el regional*, which represents the region. Finally, the delegates from the regionals vote to form the Central Committee, the maximum regular authority of the Party (PC 2002).

there, as I noticed over several weeks in which he was silently going to the regular meetings without inviting me. Viewed from today, Manuel´s attitude was perfectly reasonable: like every other formal or informal group or organization in La Victoria, the cell/cultural centre was basically constituted by friends. As I would soon realize, what ultimately defined their condition as an organization was not so much their shared political ideas or other personal motivations as their shared friendship (see Chapter 3). Thus, any new member could alter the friendship network that underlined the existence of the organization and be problematic for the member who had invited the newcomer.

Unpredictably, one day Manuel approached me and told me that the cell/cultural centre was planning an activity to commemorate the murder of 12 members of the FPMR Guerrilla (*Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez* – Manuel Rodríguez Patriotic Front) during dictatorship, in a very famous case of human rights violation known as '*Operación Albania'*.[25] In order to prepare the commemoration event they were going to need some help and he thought that I might want to come along with him and help. During that week I spent every evening and night in the community centre of the Communist Party, painting flags, preparing speeches, cleaning the place, arranging chairs and furniture, as well as getting to know and talking to the group members. On the day the event was taking place, the following Saturday, I arrived very early in the morning to help them with all the final details of the event that would be carried out that evening. Thus I was working hard all morning writing the victims' names on the portraits that they had painted earlier in the week. The event was full (around 50 people), including some relatives of the victims. As the presenter introduced the stories of every FPMR member that was killed, a person went onto the stage with the specific victim's portrait and with a lit candle that was placed in front of the portrait. Every three or four portrait presentations, there was an intermediate cultural act performed by a singer or dancer. Probably the most heart-breaking moment of the act was when the sister of one of the victims went onto the stage and performed, almost crying, a song that she had composed for her brother. When all the portraits were on stage, the presenter made the final speech and afterwards all the people stood up and sang the

[25] *Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez* (FPMR), was the armed wing of the Communist Party during the 1980s, when this party adopted 'the politics of mass popular rebellion' in which all the forms of fight – even the violent ones – were accepted in order to defeat the dictatorship.

*Internationale* and FPMR anthems. At the end, a folk music group performed on the stage for half an hour.

The event was considered a success by the cell/cultural centre members and due to my support I was tacitly accepted to participate in the following meetings. Thus, as an external researcher spectator I started to attend the regular meetings trying not to interfere in the group discussions and decision making processes while taking notes for my research. However, I was still an outsider, so my presence there was strange for them and for myself. I realized that this slightly uncomfortable condition could not last for long and two possible paths were open to me: leave the organization when I had enough notes for my research, or become part of the group and a proper member of the organization. An event made the decision for me. A month after the commemoration act, one of the cell members, Rulo, had a health issue. He was diagnosed with tendinitis in both arms and therefore needed money to pay for the treatment. As one of its members was in a difficult situation, the group decided to organize a fundraising event for him. The form of the event chosen was a *peña*, which is an evening/night-time quiet meeting in which the assistants sit at tables (as in a restaurant) consuming beverages and food while watching a cultural show (normally folk music and dance).[26] When I asked some of the cell/cultural members why they did not have a party instead of a *peña,* as with the former they could have more people and therefore more money, they replied 'it is impossible to organize a party here in La Victoria without it ending with people fighting and shooting in the middle of the event. This is even more impossible to prevent if you sell alcohol'.

During the following days, I helped with all the preparations and throughout the event itself I was moving around helping with the sound, the security and other tasks. When the show finished at 2am and most of the older people were gone, the DJ put on some music for dancing. By that time I had taken a lot of alcohol and was a little bit drunk. Most of the cell members were present in that moment as well as some young guests. Everyone was dancing and talking. At some point I went up to the stage to talk to Rulo

[26] *Peñas* comes from Allende's time and before, but they were popularized during dictatorship as the only kind of social/cultural activity slightly tolerated by the military regime because of its calmness (in a context of highly restricted freedoms). They are still a very common activity among the communist militants.

and I casually found an open microphone that was still there from the show. Without thinking too much of the low profile that I was following those days in order to keep my observer position, and obviously as an effect of the alcohol, I took the microphone and started to sing. Three minutes later everyone was laughing out loud and cheering me on while my karaoke performance became a complete show. I was there singing and laughing with them when Arturo took another microphone, went onto the stage with me and people continued to laugh at us both. When I left the stage many cell/cultural centre members approached me congratulating me and making many jokes about my performance and my drunkenness. That night I arrived to my house at 6am after having deep and impossible-to-remember conversations with some of them. Amanda and Manuel were waiting really worried about me.

After this event my relationship with the cell members changed completely. We became almost instantly friends and without saying anything I became part of the organization as a proper member. Surprisingly, although I had more affinity and connection with some of them (for example, with Nicanor and Ernesto), I started to feel that all of them were my friends, and with the exception of Manuel, that that friendship was developed with all of them at the same time. In the next meetings, I found it completely natural to give my honest opinion in every conversation as they were waiting for my words as those of any other member. Actually, I did not have any problem in exchanging ideas, arguing and criticizing them or anyone if I had a different position or perspective. As an effect of my honesty and theirs I became more and more committed to the organization, leading some cell/cultural centre activities and assuming different roles within the organization, even as a representative in meetings with other groups or authorities (see Chapter 2). Obviously, they continued to make fun of me for my supposed love of karaoke and alcohol and I responded by making fun of them as well. During my farewell party, several of my friends' speeches remembered Rulo´s *peña* as the moment when they met 'the real Pablo'.

What did the first *once* with my host family and Rulo's *peña* have in common? Why did these events have the effect of producing affection and thereby activating our relationships as family and friends? How are non-voluntary and predetermined relationships created in the *población* or, in other words, how is affection produced to

tie people together if affection is beyond people's will? In order to solve these questions we have to analyse in detail the plot of these stories and, specifically, the actions that I have identified as those that built the bridge between me and the *pobladores*.

In the first case, although I was there sitting at their table, talking and sharing an *once* with my host family for a while, it was not until the moment I asked for a glass of cold water that I started to take part in their domestic dynamics. In the second story, I was participating for some weeks in the cultural centre and people could identify me, but I was not considered a proper member until I started to sing in Rulo's *peña*. As we saw, both initial actions were in fact spontaneous movements that I performed without knowing their effects – or without knowing even if they would have any kind of effect. This spontaneity was also appreciated in the moment by my host family and my friends, and was the basis of laughs in both situations. Thus, probably for them there was no doubt of the unintentional or involuntary nature of my first actions due to the fact that they were unexpected and ridiculous for the situation and myself. In both cases, laughing and mocking were the appropriate responses according to the contexts, but they implied an extent of closeness that I did not have with them until that point. In the *población*, mockery is only debited between related people because otherwise it would be seen as an offense or a threat. Unrelated people do not mock each other, they just greet each other or do not talk at all (as with my family and the members of Ruben's gang), although they mutually gossip about the other behind their backs. Therefore, we had two unintentional and unexpected actions: my first ridiculous act, and their response laughing and mocking. Because of this, I also interpreted their mocking as spontaneous and instead of considering their actions as offensive I felt that they were treating me as a member of their family or their group of friends. Consequently, I started to laugh with them, which was evidence for them that I was willing to be made fun of. In the whole process, affection had unexpectedly been articulated between us for the first time and thereafter my relations with family and friends were able to be reinforced through the everyday life.

This analysis sheds light over at least two important and more general insights about affection in the *población*. First, affection emerges in a non-interested ground, as an

unexpected connection between people who do not hide any previous intention – firstly the intention of making a relationship. In my stories, I had been trying to be accepted by my family for a couple of hours and by the members of the cultural centre for some weeks, but the situations were artificial – a product of my desire to conduct research there. Rather, it was through actions that were considered unintentional and spontaneous that the appropriate context emerged so that the relations could actually be activated. Second, above this spontaneous and non-interested ground there must be a voluntary act that in my stories is portrayed by my acceptance of their laughs and jokes. This act is the mark of what I call the sacrificial character of affection. Basically, after my initial involuntary actions I had become an object of jokes, making me vulnerable in front of others because I was not in a position to reverse the jokes. Thus, I let them freely laugh at me, exposing myself to a negative experience – at most to a humiliation or degradation. In this context, I accepted the jokes and laughed with them, which can also be considered as a jump into the social vacuum, a free-gift or self-sacrifice, without expecting anything in return. The connection between the two conditions of affection is evident now: these little acts of sacrifice would have not been possible or reliable had they not arisen from a spontaneous context – or an unexpected connection. If the whole situation would have seemed premeditated or planned, the act would have not been 'sacrificial' because it would be evident that I was expecting something and consequently it would have been ineffective, and no relationship would have been activated.

Although the situations that I have described here could seem very specific or perhaps unique in terms of the people involved, I think in their basis they are a good illustration of the kind of experiences around which affection is generally produced and reproduced in La Victoria. In the first place, joking and laughing are common behaviours between related people everywhere in the *población*. People live everyday life with large doses of humour, teasing each other, using funny nicknames, laughing while gossiping or when they see each other on the streets or in the domestic space. Even in the cases when people talk about difficult experiences in their lives, they are usually making jokes as Ruiz has exemplified with a conversation in which a *pobladora* told her that she used to be beaten in the past by her husband, while making funny jokes about him during the whole conversation (Ruiz 2012). I experienced

similar situations many times during my fieldwork, during interviews or when I had personal conversations with family and friends. Thus, it is more common to see people laughing/joking than suffering in the *población* or perhaps people have learned to incorporate memories of suffering through jokes in order to behave according to *pobladores'* everyday attitudes and/or to live a better life. Historian Maximiliano Salinas (1996) has been one of the few researchers who have highlighted the pervasiveness of humour in Chilean popular sectors throughout history. This contrasts with the serious and impersonal national project of the conservative and liberal elite since independence, a duality that remembers Bakhtin´s work on popular humour (Bakhtin 1984).

Secondly, my experiences are ordinary in the *población* because joking is just one of the forms in which people can show themselves as vulnerable in front of others. Thus, Han (2012) has revealed the importance of 'sharing intimacies' to connect people and enhance their extent of closeness, a practice that she experienced directly in her fieldwork. I agree with Han as I also experienced several of these moments with my friends and family, as my first conversation with Amanda illustrates. However, it is not always so easy to gain access to people in order to share intimacies and, in many cases, it is necessary to first experience a spontaneous and non-interested situation – an unexpected connection – in order to do so. For example, Claudio's story of how he lost his brother when his brother talked badly about Claudio´s wife was told to me when we were drinking beers after Rulo´s *peña*.

The sacrificial character of affection is evident when people make themselves vulnerable in front of others, but also it is expressed through countless performances of care, kindness, support and concern that related people carry out daily for each other. In absolutely all these cases, as in my experiences with family and friends, these everyday actions must be performed without expecting anything in return in order to preserve the disinterested and inevitable bond between people. In fact, *pobladores* can notice if a person is not acting spontaneously or disinterestedly because they live in a transparent world marked by pervasive gossip. Affection rests then, on an everyday sacrificial substrate that Mayblin (2014) has defined in her work as *aneconomical* sacrifice, a free gift that does not pursue any aim or anything in return. Therefore, it

must remain unrecognized or 'untold' in order to be effective. In the *población*, although every relationship can be seen as a long and infinite sequence of untold sacrifices, there is a sort of collective recognition that indirectly emanates from gossip, as we saw in the example of the food collection for my neighbours Sra. Manuela and Pepe. In my opinion, this sacrificial character of the affective bond is the origin of the intensity of relationships in the *población* and their encompassing effects on *pobladores´* lives. But also, this demonstrates that although relationships are seen as non-voluntary and predetermined, they can actually be activated and deactivated because they are based on affection, an inevitable sentiment that it is created by everyday performances of unrecognized sacrifice.

## Chapter 2: The limits of affection

**'The sentence "all past times were better" does not indicate that less bad things used to happen before, but that – happily – people tend to forget them.'**

**Ernesto Sábato**

### The two faces of the *población*

It was 9am on a cold Saturday morning at the beginning of September and I was standing alone smoking in front of La Victoria *Junta de Vecinos'* (neighbourhood council) house located in 30 de Octubre Street. A bus was parked waiting for passengers in the next block, but the main street was quite empty at that time. A few minutes later, I saw Checho and Tania (president and vice-president of the *Junta de Vecinos* respectively) moving bags towards the bus and greeting people who were slowly appearing. At 9:30am, people started to arrive en masse, apologizing for the delay and with many bags, as if the one-day trip was for a much longer time. Besides the *Junta de Vecinos´* members, most of the people were delegates from different *cuadras* of the *población* and the rest were representatives of local social organizations. During the past week, the cultural centre I participated in had received two invitations for a one-day meeting through which the *Junta de Vecinos* expected to plan the upcoming activities for the anniversary of the *población* (celebrated in the last week of October every year). Rulo, who was a member of both the *Junta de Vecinos* and the cultural centre, had secretly told us that the *Junta de Vecinos* had decided to organize the trip in order to validate some decisions they had already made, due to the fact that the main event of last year's anniversary – a free show with live music – had finished abruptly with shots fired by drunk people. Now, they wanted to organize a shorter and more family-oriented show. As nobody in the cultural centre was particularly interested in the trip, I offered to be one of the representatives and Nicanor agreed to join me. It was only at 10am, just before the bus departure, that Nicanor

showed up, with evident signs of a hangover, and we boarded the bus. Thirty minutes later arrived at *El Canelo de Nos*, a meeting house located at the southern edge of Santiago.

After having breakfast in a heated dining hall, we were conducted to a meeting room where Rosa, a 50-year-old social worker who had previously lived in La Victoria, introduced herself as the facilitator of the activities. She began by asking us to introduce ourselves as well, and later she made us participate in some social dynamics or group games in order to relax the atmosphere and to meet each other. I noticed then that the participants where around 30 people, excluding the members of *Junta de Vecinos*, and that most were women aged between 50 and 60. After about an hour we started the proper work. Rosa gave each participant two sheets of paper and asked us to write on them what we considered the best two things or aspects of current life in the *población*. When we finished the task, she asked us to post the sheets on one of the white walls of the room. Once our ideas were on the wall she observed that most of the ideas were very similar. She said, 'Now I want you to bring together similar ideas into groups'. That moment was chaotic at the beginning as many people tried to grab and move the papers at the same time in different directions. Eventually however, two participants assumed the task while the rest of us looked at the pieces of paper and judged if they were in the correct group. After a couple of discussions regarding some unclear ideas, we finished and moved away from the wall. In front of us there were three big groups and five or six further ideas that we could not fit into any of them. Rosa described the wall: 'It is very interesting how we are all thinking almost the same. Clearly people think that the best things of the *población* are its solidarity and unity between friends and neighbours and the extent of participation in the *población's* activities'. So, three concepts were highlighted to describe the *población*: solidarity, unity and participation.

For the next activity, Rosa gave us new paper sheets and asked us to repeat the exercise but writing now two bad things or current problems of the *población*. Once she removed the best-things papers from the wall, we replicated the same procedure. Again, there were three big groups, although this time there was more dispersion of unrelated ideas. Some of these formed an intermediate group. Rosa stated:

> Now we do not completely agree but, clearly, we have three big ideas and another slightly smaller one. So, we considered that the big problems of the *población* are the lack of solidarity, unity and participation among neighbours. Also, we have drugs and drug dealing as an important issue as well.

In other words, the participants had selected as the main problems of the *población* the same concepts of the first exercise but in their negative form: lack of solidarity, unity and participation. How could this be possible? Why did people simultaneously consider that the *población* had and lacked the same main characteristics: solidarity, unity, and participation? This contradiction was also noted by Rosa who asked us to try to explain the results of both exercises. Some participants argued that probably some people had not understood the tasks and that the last exercise should have been related to practical problems, such as drug dealing. However, other people replied that in fact the lack of solidarity, unity and participation were the causes of the drug dealing or the insecurity problem in the *población*. They remembered the old times, when this problem almost did not exist, the *población* was more united and people were more supportive of one another.

As the discussion was lasting too long, Rosa simply stopped the conversation and moved to the last activity of the morning. She asked us to write on two new sheets of paper the solutions that we could think of for the problems or bad aspects of the *población*. Again, we repeated the same process. This time the dispersion was even greater than in the second exercise. People had mostly written practical ideas regarding the drug dealing issue (more police and social intervention) and others such as pest control (for mice problems), programmes for responsible pet ownership and waste management. Other participants tried to respond to the big problems, but the solutions were recursive in generally proposing more activities and programmes to promote solidarity, unity, and participation among neighbours, especially oriented towards young people. After this talk, we went to lunch. In the afternoon, the only planned activity was related to the changes that the *Junta de Vecinos* wanted to introduce in the anniversary show – strangely without any connection to the morning collective exercises. By 6pm we were back in La Victoria.

Over the following days, the good-bad things contradiction that emerged in the planning day stayed on my mind. I sensed that this contradiction had to mean something important for my work. As both sides were logically incompatible with each other, initially I thought that one of them could not be empirically real. Since, at the time of the discussion, people talked about the differences between the past and the present, I interpreted the perception of La Victoria as a *población* characterized by solidarity, unity and participation as a projection into the present of an identity discourse created around an image from the past. As evidence for my interpretation there were the countless times that I heard *pobladores* talking about how they had built the *población* by themselves, fighting all together against the big powers (especially the government) in order to have a house to live in and a dignified life. Similarly, they joined again to participate in solidarity in the struggle against the dictatorship in a context of extreme political and military repression. Therefore, I concluded that a shared discourse about the *población's* solidarity, unity and participation had been passed on to the current perception of a *población* that actually lacked these characteristics.

However, and despite this evidence, I continued to feel that there was something I was missing. Firstly, *pobladores* were extremely aware of the differences between this image from the past and the current social reality of the *población*. In fact, the strength of that image was partly based on the opposite discourse about the present. In short, people should have been conscious that when they were asked to describe the *población* nowadays they could not use this positive image. Second, I could personally observe that the participants of the planning activity were extremely careful and honest with their positions and opinions. Thus, I had no reason not to believe that they were being sincere regarding the current good and bad things that they saw in their *población*. Finally, I could also experience, during my time in La Victoria, some confused perceptions about social life – perceptions that could alternate between both positions described by the *pobladores* in the meeting even within the same day. In conclusion, and despite the apparent lack of logic in the answer, I started to consider the possibility that both positions were actually accurate descriptions of La Victoria and therefore that there was no contradiction at all between them. My interpretation was that *pobladores* in the planning meeting were just being extremely perceptive in

portraying a permanent condition of the everyday life in the *población*: alongside relationships and attitudes of solidarity, unity among friends and neighbours, and social participation in the *población* social life, there were scenes of selfishness, division between *pobladores* and disinterest in community affairs.

In what follows, I intend to demonstrate that this double face of La Victoria´s social life cannot be simply understood as a singular feature of the *población* nowadays but that it is a pervasive and permanent effect produced by the kinds of social relationships that *pobladores* establish between each other in their everyday life. My argument will be that both faces described by *pobladores* coexist in the *población* due to the fact that the strong bonds linking some of them – marked by unconstrained affection – inevitably lead to incredible separations and divisions with others. In the first part of the chapter, I present a set of ethnographic examples in order to propose a principle that underlines both kinship and friendship and that is behind the divisions – the amount of affection available to a person to create social relationships is limited and cannot be increased under any circumstances. Under this principle, any new relationship is seen as a threat to existing relationships and as a possible betrayal. This will lead us to discuss two competing explanations proposed by researchers regarding *pobladores'* mobilizations during the 1980s (as expressions of solidarity or anomie) and to a more general and traditional problem in social sciences about the basis of the community. In the second part of the chapter, I will return to *pobladores'* memories to show that despite the shared discourse about the past (seen as a time of solidarity, unity, and participation) it can be noticed that divisions and separations were part of the everyday life of the *población* as much as during other times. Finally, I will conclude that both selfishness and solidarity have been dimensions present throughout La Victoria´s history, either in the moments of high political mobilization (such as in the 1960s or '80s) or in demobilized times (such as nowadays). *Pobladores'* contentious politics would therefore be unrelated to their ability to express solidarity, reach unity, or even to perform everyday political participation.

**Affection as a limited good**

One of the most intriguing aspects of everyday life in the *población* that surprised me from the beginning of my fieldwork was related to the strong feelings involved in

social relationships. Friendship and kinship seemed characterized by unconstrained sentiments and total trust and commitment between those involved in these relationships. This characteristic of social relationships among *pobladores* has been also noted by some field researchers in other *poblaciones* such as Espinoza (1993), Han (2012) and Skewes (1984). As an ethnographer, living 14 months in La Victoria, I also had the possibility of participating in these kinds of relationships, making strong bonds with people from the *población*, bonds that produced important consequences for my work and my personal life. However, as I was becoming involved in these relationships, as a consequence, other possible relationships were closing. And interestingly, when these impossible relations seemed closer and more visible there was a greater element of antagonism defining them. Probably one of the greatest antagonistic relationships that I had in the field was established with Amanda's son Bruno.

In the first encounter with my host family, I could not sense anything strange in Bruno´s attitude towards me, except for some questions which I answered with extreme honesty. I interpreted this little clash as the normal incomprehension that people with a scientific or engineering background often have in relation to research in social sciences – expecting it to produce more applicable results, especially if the Chilean government is financing your research. Because Bruno did not always spend the night at the house after his work (he also spent some nights at his biological father's house in another *población*), the next time that we met was three days after I had already arrived to the house in La Victoria. By that time, I was almost completely integrated into the family's daily life and was able to receive and make jokes with them. During the *once*, Bruno was almost silent, with evident discomfort about my presence there and my closeness to them. It was not surprising then that he was the first one to leave the table, arguing that he had to get some work done. Amanda signalled to the rest of us that something was wrong with him. After the *once*, and while we were watching television, Amanda went upstairs (something she only did for very important matters) and they talked for a long time in Bruno's room. It was clear to everyone that they were talking about me. When Amanda returned, she just whispered, 'talk to you later'. The next day during lunch I had a long conversation with Amanda and Manuel in which Amanda told us about her discussion with Bruno.

The fact that he did not feel comfortable with me in the house was confirmed. He did not understand why we seemed to have become so close over just a few days and felt that they had replaced him too easily. Amanda had replied that he was her son and that his attitude was childish. For his part, Bruno had recognized that he was behaving badly and therefore said that he supported my stay in the house, but that the bad feelings were something that he could not control. Amanda finalized:

> I do not know why he is acting like that. He does not have any reason to behave in this way. He is a really good person and has always been very generous to everyone and especially to my children [the way Amanda referred to her closest students]. He will overcome it, I am sure. And do not be afraid of him, he will never complain to you or say anything about this.

As Amanda had predicted, during the whole time that I lived there he never spoke to me about this issue. But the problem was always present, it was never overcome. Thus, although our interactions were respectful, they were marked by neutrality and coldness, which in the context of the *población* is a doubtless sign of antagonism or even hatred. On my side, I tried be as friendly as possible with him when we were together in the same room. I agreed with Amanda that there was not a problem with his or my personality and, as we had not properly met before the problem had started, I used to think that a simple and good conversation could fix our relationship. Moreover, according to Amanda, we shared similar interests and opinions on many issues (so probably we could have easily been friends had we met in a different context). But that conversation never happened. Basically, no kind of approach proved possible, as if there was an invisible barrier between us that made our friendship impossible – a kind of barrier that did not depend on us, that was beyond our control.

I had already got used to living with this problem, assuming that it was 'normal' (as finally one cannot seem nice to everyone), when I started to pay attention to some stories about other neighbours' family lives. The first of many times that I heard these everyday *pelambres* or gossip, Cristina and Ester were talking about Sra. Adela in front of Cristina's shop. Sra. Adela was one of the oldest neighbours of the *cuadra* and *pobladores* talked often about her health problems. She was also very close to Amanda's mother, Sra. Paloma, and, uncommonly in the *población*, she lived alone.

People usually gossiped that she was in an abandonment condition; that lately no relatives had come to see her; that the only one that regularly visited her was her grandson; or that her health condition must have got worse because she had not left her home for some time (something always strange due to *pobladores'* attraction for life in the streets). Although, as usual, the conversation followed the same ideas, Cristina was particularly angry with Felipe, Adela's older son. Felipe was one of the wealthiest men in La Victoria, owner of two shops and the biggest liquor store in the *población*. According to Cristina, Felipe was Adela's only son who still lived in the *población*, actually just two blocks away. Although he had an excellent economic situation, he was always working, and people commented that they rarely saw him visiting his mum. I tried to participate in the conversation, saying that the responsibility for taking care of her should lie in all her sons and daughters and that she was clearly in no condition to live alone anymore. Cristina replied:

> She does not want to leave her house. But that is not the point. She is Felipe's responsibility because he was always her favourite son. Everyone knows that. No one could ask Pedro [another of Sra. Adela's sons] to do something about it because neither would he do it nor would she accept to live with him.

A similar story had Sra. María as its main character. She was Amanda's *comadre* (Carolina's godmother) and one of her best friends in the *población*. Sra. María was single, with no children and no job. Instead, she was a full-time caregiver for her mother, Sra. Jacinta, with whom she lived. Once, I told Amanda that it must be sad for Sra. María to focus all her life solely on her mum and she replied:

> Yes, of course. But none of Jacinta's sons or daughters would like to take charge of their mum, except María. But that is not the main problem. The problem is that Jacinta mistreats and has always mistreated María because she is not her favourite daughter. That is the worse part for María.

Soon I realized that these stories or gossip about imbalances in affection were widespread in the *población* and commonly used to explain many family problems. Sometimes the structure changed and there were children that did not love their mother

or father in the same way, differences in affection between grandfather/mother and grandson/daughter, between siblings, etc. I asked two of my best friends in the *población*, Nicanor and Ernesto, about their relationships with their families. Although they did not explicitly use the concept of affection, they referred to the imbalances in their respective families as different extents of closeness – and therefore that less closeness led to more problems. In Nicanor's family (composed of four members), he was very close to his mother while he had lots of problems with his father. Nicanor's only sister was exactly the opposite. In Ernesto's case, on the contrary, he was very close to his father while he had a relationship marked by resentment with his mother. And again, Ernesto's only sister went in the opposite direction. They considered it completely normal to have a good relationship with one of the parents and a bad one with the other and also that this happened in the opposite direction as their sisters because 'you can't be close to both at the same time'.

A common theme to most of these stories and gossip was that, due to these imbalances, a relationship in which less affection is interchanged (as between Sra. María and Sra. Jacinta) becomes or is understood as a relationship marked by resentment and dislike. In other words, a mother who demonstrates more love to one of her children generates not just a less affectionate relationship with the others but also tensions that could finally lead to dislike (with the mother or between siblings). Amanda, for example, had sad memories of her childhood because her parents were more worried about caring about her and her sisters' sexual behaviour – that they should not sexually interact with men – but less about them as persons. Moreover, Gabriela (Amanda´s older sister) was always her parents' favourite daughter, and therefore Amanda had to learn to live with less attention, less comprehension and less affection from them. In this context, Gabriela took care of her as a person, making them close sisters despite the unequal relationship with their parents. Thus, although Amanda loved her parents and, according to her, 'at this point I already forgave them', it was clear that she still felt resentment for the treatment that she had received from them, especially in her childhood. This experience had a great influence on Amanda's adult life. When, on a certain occasion, I asked her why she had not had more children, she answered, 'There were several factors. An important one was that I did not want Carolina [her daughter]

to live through what I lived thorough when I was a child, having to compete and share my love with someone else'.

As we could see in these stories/*pelambres* and many similar others that I heard in the *población*, there is a key aspect that all of them have in common: that imbalances in affection are inevitable. In other words, these imbalances are not necessarily the result of personal affinities/differences (in ideas, temperaments, ages, etc.) or personality clashes between the actors of these little kinship dramas, as they exist no matter who is living through them. Amanda's fear of having another baby did not correspond to the belief that she could not be a good mother for her children but only to the unavoidable and tragic observation that one of them would finally receive less affection from her. These widespread stories in the *población* and their condition of unavoidability (which means that the imbalances do not depend on the people involved) allow us to consider that they are portraying a kinship principle within the *población*: people understand affection as something scarce. In other words, every person has a limited amount of affection available to give to others and to build relationships (in these cases, kinship) and therefore affection cannot increase if you have, for example, more than one child. You will then have to distribute this limited good among your children. Logically thinking, you can still give an equal amount to each of them, living in permanent self-awareness of your acts in order not to fall into imbalances. However, as we saw before, relationships in the *población* are characterized by unconstrained sentiments and total trust and commitment between those who participate in them. Therefore, it is socially expected for relationships to be strong as a result of the unconditional gift of affection. This conception makes it unthinkable to have the possibility of establishing a relationship while you are, at the same time, limiting or controlling the amount of affection given (in order to distribute equally or for any other reason). Thus, in this context, you are inevitably condemned to fall into imbalance, if affection is understood as a limited good which cannot be increased under any circumstance.

Looking through the lens of this principle, my mysterious problem with Bruno can now become approachable. As we saw, the barrier that separated us did not depend on our personalities or even on any actual conflict between us. On the contrary, according

to Amanda, we should have been good friends. Thus, the problem was actually inevitable and beyond our control: I represented a threat to him just because Amanda and Manuel's amount of affection was limited. This meant that their affection could not increase and therefore that it could not be shared with another person without Bruno losing part of his own received affection. In other words, the invisible barrier that separated us was simply a particular expression of the conception of affection as something scarce. Although the barrier was present from the beginning, I could not feel exactly what Bruno was feeling until, on an occasion after several months living there, I was not invited to a family meeting at Amanda's parents' house. I felt really bad as if they were betraying me and that my relationship with them had been fake the whole time. When they came back to the house I was feeling frustrated. So, I could not avoid talking to Manuel and Amanda and letting them know that if they did not want me in the house anymore I could leave the next day. They looked sad and tried to convince me not to leave the house. They told me that this situation was unique and that it would never happen again. Finally, I stayed and thereafter I was always invited to every family activity.

**Divisions, betrayals and the political economy of affection**

Contrary to what might be the impression up to this point, the principle of affection as a limited good is not only circumscribed to kinship. In fact, it is in the domain of friendship that the action of this principle becomes more evident and effective, configuring thus not only every relationship but underlying the entire social milieu of the *población*.

As with Bruno, the processes of making family and making friends in the *población*, while it allowed me to closely approach several people, it radically separated me from others. Regarding the *cuadra* where I lived, from the moment of my arrival I immediately became the enemy of Amanda and Manuel's enemies. Most of the young people of my *cuadra* were part of the group that normally met in front of Amanda's house. They took drugs, drank alcohol, had fights and parties, talked and laughed out loud on the street all day, every day. Nonetheless, despite their permanent presence on the street just outside Amanda's house, the members of the family behaved all the time as if they were not there. When they passed them on the street, they ignored them even

if they were shouting or smoking drugs just a few steps away. The members of the gang behaved similarly towards the family. Other neighbours, friends of Amanda and Manuel, acted in the same way, ignoring the presence of the gang members. This behaviour was even more surprising if we consider that greeting other people is mandatory in the *población*, even when you pass someone you do not know. But in this case, all the members of the gang (including most of their families and some friends) simply did not exist to the other group of neighbours and vice versa. In this context, I realised from the beginning that without knowing it I had already taken part and that no relationship with them was possible. I had to adapt my behaviour and act the same way, disregarding them. Although no family member explicitly said anything I knew that if I tried to contact the gang I would surpass an invisible but fundamental social boundary. The members of the gang also ignored me all the time that I lived in the *población*.

Beyond my *cuadra* it is no exaggeration to say that the whole *población* was full of invisible barriers that separated people from each other. Some of these divisions stemmed from many years ago and could be expressed in soft or extreme forms. Thus, among the political groups from the 1980s, the divisions they set in those times are completely active nowadays. For example, I tried to interview one of the *población* leaders from the 1980s that belonged to MIR (Revolutionary Leftist Movement). I talked to her and she kindly made me an appointment for the next week when she had more time. But before the agreed day, she saw me with my communist friends and afterwards she avoided me the whole time that I spent in La Victoria. Similarly, the same divisions exist among those who were part of the same political tendency, as it seems to confirm the numerous quarrels that until today divide different groups of communist militants.

In most of these cases, the divisions cannot be debited to political or ideological differences but to specific personal events or facts that separated them. This is precisely what happened between two communists, Amanda and Carlos. During the 1980s, Amanda and Carlos worked together in a communist cultural centre and became friends. Amanda was very kind to Carlos and tried to help him in his life. Until today, Carlos remembers Amanda from this time with respect and affection. When the

struggles against dictatorship intensified, Carlos entered the Communist Combat Unit from the *población* and later the FPMR guerrilla. This was a period in which they did not see each other often, mainly because Carlos was clandestine most of the time. After the end of the dictatorship, they did not resume an everyday relationship because they lived in different parts of the *población* and had stopped participating actively in political organizations. However, they maintained a good relationship and their friendship was reactivated when they saw each other, despite Carlos being a well-known drug user. Everything changed by the middle of the 1990s when Amanda received the information that Manuel – her husband – was consuming drugs. Moreover, during those terrible days someone told her that Manuel had been seen with Carlos, and she understood that Manuel and Carlos were consuming together. She blamed Manuel's use of drugs on Carlos and therefore no kind of relationship was possible anymore. Amanda felt that Carlos had betrayed her trust as had helped her husband to find drugs instead of caring about how this would affect her.

Among many others, a similar but more transcendent story because of the people involved, was told to me in the form of gossip by my friend Rosa. Two women, political leaders of the *población*, but from different political groups, used to be close friends during the 1980s. As they lived in the same street they knew each other from before the mobilization period (1983-86) and their friendship persisted despite their respective groups being opposed to their relationship. Their friendship could even withstand the numerous and permanent gossip that each group told regarding the other as receiving money for the *población* and was keeping it for personal purposes – a typical kind of gossip among political groups until today. One of the friends' husbands had been a political prisoner since the end of the 1970s and therefore she had to take care of her children and her house by herself. One day, a rumour started to run through the *población*: a neighbour had seen her with an unknown man from outside the *población*. She had left him at the bus stop and they seemed very close. The story immediately became food for gossip: she was having an affair with the stranger while her husband was in prison. This piece of gossip reached her friend who went to her house for an explanation. According to Rosa, 'the story had to be true because they stopped being friends and today they hate each other. They are enemies'. The interesting element of this story is that the friendship had survived the more horrible

gossip related to money (that in other cases would have easily led to a fall out) but that the gossip about romantic betrayal had destroyed the relationship. In my perception, the link between these two friends was based on the fact that one of them was suffering because she was living through a terrible situation produced by dictatorship. Her husband was in jail because he had sacrificed himself fighting against the regime and, with this, he had sacrificed his entire family. To the other friend, the only possible answer had been to support and care for her friend despite all the gossip and the problems with her own family and other friends. But the affair implied that she was not suffering at all, that no sacrifice was being made. Actually, the only one who had sacrificed something – her husband – had been betrayed, and in doing this she had also betrayed her friend.

These stories of betrayal are incredibly common in the *población* and I could say that they are the primary content of most gossip. Many of the invisible barriers that divide the *población* are related to specific and personal betrayal stories, and these encompass not only political groups but all the groups, organizations and people of the *población* (I heard betrayal stories between church members, drug gangs, some of my neighbours, etc.). In fact, the aforementioned *pelambres* about imbalances of affection in kinship are also betrayals. All my friends and all the *pobladores* had, in the past, suffered several betrayals from members of their families and friends. Unbelievably, although a person can be betrayed during her/his life on several occasions, this does not produce a distrustful social personhood or a social world based on expecting upcoming tricks. Because, for every betrayal to be true, it needs to be preceded by a relationship based on unconstrained affection between those involved. Any new betrayal just reaffirms the power of affection through the idea that the traitor was never a real friend – and therefore that their affection was fake in the first place or that it was never really present. Normally, every new betrayal leads to a new configuration of the network of relationships and therefore of the persons themselves through a redefinition of social barriers. While personhood is defined in the *población* by just a limited set of social relationships that cannot be expanded without falling into betrayal, among the Mapuche people of southern Chile studied by Course (2007), personhood is understood as an open-ended process, as 'an ongoing project of self-creation' (2007: 82). In other words, for the Mapuche, a 'true person' has an unlimited potential to

create social relationships with others, which is exactly the opposite from the *pobladores'* case, where each person is completely constituted at once. Yet, one may counter that *pobladores'* betrayals really expand their meaningful social relationships, but, in doing so, they have to deal with the separation and distance – very often including feelings of hatred – with their former friends and the self-production of a new person.

Due to these social implications of betrayal, in the context of the *población* a betrayal is never something that only encompasses the person involved in the specific situation. Thus, what is behind all these stories is basically an election of a different network of relationships or a display of the real or genuine network. In every case, the traitor is just choosing other people instead of the friend(s) betrayed. In the problem between Amanda and Carlos, the latter decided for Manuel (and other drug consumer friends) over Amanda. In the incident between the two leaders, the traitor chose the affair before her friend (and her husband). As most of the stories and gossip that people told me came from the past, I will present an example of a case that I witnessed, and could therefore have access to all those involved (although in this situation the problem did not produce a total break).

The group that formed the cultural centre/communist cell in which I participated, was actually a close group of friends. Trust and affection were the basic values that it was possible to find in formal meetings and informal conversation between the members. I heard several of them saying at different moments that he/she would be willing to give their life for the others and that they knew that the others would do the same. Alongside the closeness between members, they mistrusted and, in some cases, dislike other groups and people from the *población* (especially those related to politics). Thus, when one of the members showed an affinity with other known people outside the group, relationships were stressed. In my case, although they knew that I was conducting research and had to interview other people, whenever they saw me with others, they let me know that they disapproved of that behaviour. But another problem was present through all the time that I was part of the Centre. Manuel was a good friend of Checho, the president of the *Junta de Vecinos* and, like Manuel, a member of the Communist Party. Because of his position, Checho had become an important local

actor and therefore someone who was not indifferent to the group. However, many members of the group distrusted and disliked Checho because, as Claudio told me:

> He betrayed us in a Communal Communist Party meeting. We both saw an important member of the party acting badly in an event and we agreed to tell everyone what had happened. But at the time of the meeting he retracted and did not say anything. He is a coward and a traitor.

Manuel and Checho's friendship was revealed in every conversation in which Checho or the neighbourhood council were mentioned, producing countless strong discussions within the cultural centre. In short, while almost everyone attacked Checho, Manuel defended him. Although none of these discussions led to a break-up in the relationships or the group, there was a permanent tension that questioned Manuel's affections and commitments. And after every discussion Manuel used to tell me that he should leave the cell and start a new one with Checho. But this never happened because that would have meant total betrayal of his friends. However, another betrayal ended with Carmen, one of my friends from the cultural centre, permanently leaving the organization (the whole story is in Chapter 3).

The last example allows us to conclude that any betrayal always implies a movement of the affection given, from some people towards others. In other words, a betrayal can be seen as a sign that, in the context of the *población,* it is basically impossible to give affection to or be friends with everyone. Thus, under this conception rests the same principle that we have described in the case of kinship: that affection is understood as something scarce. As such, affection should be maximized in a few recipients and not wasted on many. Friendship and kinship are expected to be strong and based on unconstrained sentiments because, otherwise, people are just wasting their limited amount of affection on others, and this is the basis of betrayal. In this sense, sociability is experienced by *pobladores* not as infinite creation of meaningful relationships throughout life but as distribution and sometimes redistribution of this limited good among some people. The inevitability of this allocation configures a particular social regime that I call the political economy of affection in the *población*. Certainly, I am not using the concept of political economy as any kind of individual rational election or economic maximization process. Among *pobladores*, people are not expected to use

affection strategically, due to the fact that relationships are always considered to be disinterested and honest. Rather, I understand political economy here as the permanent management of affection – concentrating affection, avoiding stress on former relationship through new ones, management of social distances – that *pobladores* perform every day in a collective interplay within the *población*. It is under this regime of a political economy of affection that the two faces of the *población* described at the beginning of this chapter are produced and reproduced reciprocally: confidence, solidarity, unity and affection with some people lead inevitably to distrust, selfishness, division and resentment towards others and vice versa.

The comprehension of affection as a limited good and the resultant regime of a political economy of affection transforms the *población*'s social landscape into an experience of dispersion and fragmentation. With this, I am not suggesting an image of a preceding and encompassing unity composed by these fragments. Instead, and following Strathern (1992) and Wagner (1991), due to the fact that *pobladores'* sociability is built around each person's limited affection, infinite fragments are the only phenomenological observation that can be debited to the *población'*s everyday life. This landscape can be characterized by an indeterminate cluster of informal and formal groups of friends/family that are closed to each other but that cultivate strong bonds of affection between their members. Between different groups, the closer they are within the social space, the more antagonistic the relationships between their members seem to be. This explains why, as in the case of Checho, my communist friends demonstrated more feelings of dislike towards other communists than towards people in other political groups, and more resentment towards political groups than to other social organizations in the *población*. Depending on the case, the feelings involved in the relationships between people from different groups can go from mistrust to total hatred and despise.

**Solidary ties, distrustful separations**

The principle of affection as a limited good that I have been describing as the basis of *pobladores'* sociability can be traced back in the history of anthropology. Probably its most important antecedent is George M. Foster's research in a small rural Mexican community. According to Foster (1967), people from Tzintzuntzan consider that good

things (and he mentions explicitly affection among others) are limited in a way that when someone has too much of something good (such as money), that person is taking good things from others. This principle is used by Foster not only to portray the pessimistic vision of life that Mexican peasants had developed in a context of rapid modernization and urbanization in the country, but also to show the extreme individualism that he found in the village, in contrast to the solidary ties that were highlighted by Redfield (1956) in his romantic description of a similar rural community in Mexico – rooted in egalitarian, traditional and solidary social relationships. Besides the similarities that we can find between Foster´s proposal and the principle of affection as a limited good that I have been describing throughout this chapter, a fundamental difference separates these ideas. While for Foster the amount of the good things is limited for the whole village and therefore this total amount is distributed (equally or not) among all the peasants, in the *población* affection is limited to each person, who has to distribute this scarce resource between some people and to deny it to others. Thus, in the *población* every person has a similar – but limited – amount of affection to produce social relationships and under no circumstances can a person expand his/her personal amount of affection. In the same vein, an evident economic improvement for a person or family – which is the central point in Foster's principle – is not explained in the *población* as if people were taking money from others but as a personal result produced by children's university studies or drug selling.

The notion that each person has a limited amount of affection to give to others and to form social relationships is reminiscent of Strathern's (1992) description of the Melanesian person. For Strathern, a person is a complete entity that internally contains all the social relationships that will later be externally activated and will compose – now in an incomplete way – the person. In my terms, I also understand *pobladores'* social relationships as contained within the person. Due to the limited affection available to build social relationships, these are seen by *pobladores* as the honest and true expression of the person and therefore they always appear as the only possible ties. But, unlike Strathern, I see that there is no incompleteness in this process. As I stated before, a person in the *población* is always a complete entity composed of all the relationships that could ever define it.

Course (2011) has made a counter point to Strathern's proposal because, according to him, in order to become a person, a Mapuche must go beyond the relationships already inscribed in the person at birth – normally the kin – and enter into the terrain of friendship, in which relationships are formed by autonomous volition. Although relationships inscribed in the person and relationships created by volition may seem very different in nature, I think that what made *pobladores'* social relationships interesting is that they are simultaneously 'inscribed' and 'voluntary'. The voluntary condition of *pobladores'* social relationship cannot be only detected in the perception that they are not instrumental and are instead purely based on the affection produced through a volitive act – sacrifice – , but also in resentment as the effect of when affection is denied. Dislike and resentment, as a common result of the denial of affection, appear in *pobladores'* everyday lives precisely because the relationships are not only considered inscribed, but also as decisions that a person has taken in favour of some rather than others. Dislike is the undeniable evidence that the person is being blamed for their specific distribution of affection, which is seen, therefore, as a voluntary act. Rephrasing my whole argument, it is this double condition of social relationships – as inscribed and voluntary – that produces, in my opinion, solidary ties and distrustful separations at the same time in the *población*.

In a similar tone to Foster's argument of separation and lack of solidary ties, Oscar Lewis (1961) developed his well-known concept of 'culture of poverty' after his research in a poor urban neighbourhood in Mexico City (expanded afterwards to other cities and countries). I must mention first that Lewis' work is an obligatory reference for anthropological urban studies in poor contexts, such as my own. Lewis considers that due to the lack of integration into the broader capitalist economic system, some poor people – but not all – have developed a particular culture or subculture which is reproduced in the new generations. This subculture is described by Lewis as an 'effort to stop the feelings of despair and hopelessness that arise from making evident the improbability of reaching success in the terms of big society's values and goals' (Lewis 1967: 54). Although the 'culture of poverty' concept considers a non-exhaustive list of features and values – making it an ideal type more than a complete reality – some of them are especially relevant for my argument. According to Lewis, people who carry this culture are highly fatalistic and resigned, living with an

orientation towards the present and a permanent felling of inferiority, distrusting everyone especially government institutions, apathetic in their everyday life and incredibly individualistic – even within the domestic space – due to the scarce economic resources they have access to. Beyond the criticism that such kinds of generalization can receive, especially if we consider that some parts of his list seem to be prejudices, I think that, in essence, Lewis' description is close enough to one of the faces of the *población*. Although La Victoria apparently would not be considered as a fertile ground for a 'culture of poverty' due to its history of political struggle and the sense of belonging and pride with which most *pobladores* talk about their *población*, scenes of selfishness, apathy, resignation and individualism can very often be found in *pobladores'* everyday life. My argument is that these scenes are just one side of the coin and, as I already mentioned, they coexist with moments and relationships marked by solidarity, unity, interest and total trust.

The discussion regarding the nature of social ties can also be found in descriptions and debates regarding Chilean *pobladores* themselves, especially when they became one of the main political actors in the struggle against Pinochet´s dictatorship (1983-1986). Their unexpected emergence was seen as an incredible social event by many researchers and political analysts who elaborated two opposed hypotheses to explain the fact. On the one hand, some social scientists – mostly sociologists – considered that *pobladores* were a remnant effect produced by modernization and the urbanization process during the 20th century in Chile and, therefore, the mobilization process in the 1980s was a consequence of the lack of integration into an economic, political and social system that was incapable of incorporating them. Their struggles then were seen just as anomic violence produced by their marginality in a context of economic crisis. In order to confirm this idea, they conducted several studies through interviews and surveys in which they showed that *pobladores* were mostly apathetic to the political situation, highly individualistic and interested especially in their own individual good (Arriagada 1988, Campero 1987, Salman 1994, Tironi 1987, Valenzuela 1984).

On the other hand, the opposing hypothesis was founded on the same principle of exclusion but to highlight that *pobladores* had maintained, despite military repression, a historical identity or a common cultural unity (to some authors, class unity) that had

been the critical feature allowing them to join-up and organize in order to confront dictatorship. These authors also showed many on-the-ground studies and especially, historical analysis, through which they located the 1980s mobilizations as one of the cyclical events that had been led throughout the 20th century by *pobladores* and Chilean popular sectors in general (Baño 2004, Garcés and de la Maza 1985, Oxhorn 1995, Posner 2008, Salazar 2006, Razeto 1987, Valdés 1986). Thus, Espinoza (1993) has noted that the explanations regarding the 1980s mobilization have moved between the decomposition of social bonds (anomie) and the solidarity ties among *pobladores*. Although this controversy was never solved, according to my ethnographic data these hypotheses were inaccurate if we take each one individually. Instead, if we consider that both phenomena – anomie and solidarity – can be part of the same social reality then we can understand why these studies arrived at those apparently contradictory results.

Taking into account all of these discussions, the limits of sociability that the principle of affection as a limited good portrays seem to inevitably refer to an important distinction in anthropology and the social sciences regarding two contrasting views of social relationships. According to Stasch (2009), all of the literature in social science can be considered part of one of these traditions of thought. On the one hand, we can have relationships formed by mutual identification which normally have been conceptualized as the foundation of an encompassing totality, namely the community (Stasch 2009). Durkheim was pointing to this kind of social relationship when he proposed his notion of 'mechanical solidarity'. After him, many anthropologists have developed their studies around this idea, trying to reveal the common identity and the solidary ties that form the groups or societies investigated (an exemplary case is Redfield 1956).

On the other hand, social relationships are seen as primarily characterized by differences and separations between people that do not necessarily form an encompassing totality. Simmel, who built his sociology around the notion of the person, is usually inscribed in this position because, according to him, every social relation involves at the same time identity and otherness (Simmel 1950). In my opinion, Foster and Lewis are also located in this tradition due to the fact that their

proposals stress the differences and distances between people, although they cannot escape from conceptualizing a totally that they call, respectively, community and culture. While the first position, of relationships formed by mutual identification, has been criticized because they can be a projection of a romantic or occidental anthropological view of people, the second one, of otherness, can overlook the fact that people very often do actually produce relationships marked by identification (or by the commitment of unity as we shall see in the next chapter) and have the idea of being part of a higher and surrounding entity – although their definitions of it may vary. Thus, and following Cohen (1985), community should not be understood as an objective totality that exists on its own and beyond the people involved in it. Rather, a community is a symbolic construction made by people in interaction and, therefore, that may be perceived in highly different terms even by those that consider themselves as part of the same community (Cohen 1985). As we saw in the initial story of this chapter, *pobladores* actually experience both kinds of social relationships – identification and otherness – with different people and have a common and territorialized representation of a totality that they call La Victoria. However, at the same time, alongside their meaningful relationships, for any person the social limits of the *población* tend to blur into infinite others. In fact, my own experience living in the *población* – and my very first observation into the field – was that of fragmentation: instead of seeing a totality encompassing groups or people, I saw groups or fragments encompassing totalities (or relationships marked by affection and identification).

Summarizing, my argument is basically that, as an effect of the principle of affection as a limited good, *pobladores* experience in their everyday lives both kinds of relationships: solidary and identification ties with some, and separation and division bonds – marked by dislike and resentment – with others. This idea is also present in what I consider the closest ethnographic description that we can find in anthropological literature to *pobladores'* sociability, *The People of the Sierra* by Julian Pitt-Rivers. According to Pitt-Rivers (1971), in the Spanish town of Grazalema, friendship is understood as a 'free association with the person of one´s choice' that implies both mutual liking and obligation through mutual service and 'sacrifice'. As friendship is expected to be disinterested, when any kind of interest is revealed, betrayal arises and the relationship brakes down. Then, 'the way is left clear for a re-alignment of personal

relations' (Pitt-Rivers 1971: 139). In Pitt-Rivers' description, both kinds of relationships – identification and separation – are present at the same time within the community, aligning people on different 'sides': friends and enemies. A person cannot have friends on both sides because otherwise this friendship is not 'real' but instrumental. In this sense, we can see the incredible similarities between Pitt-Rivers' description and my own. However, our paths separate afterwards because while Pitt-Rivers tries to show the implications of having powerful friends – powerful in terms of money and political connections – I decide to further explore the impossibilities of expanding social relationships and the social implications of betrayals, as we have seen in this chapter.

### *Pobladores'* unity and individualism in different times

The idea of affection as a limited good came to me when I was in the field. It seemed to me that it was effective in explaining two of the most characteristic conditions of everyday life in the *población*: on one hand, strong relationships based on affection and trust; on the other, separation and division between groups and people. Living *pobladores'* life, making friends and family, and hearing stories and gossip, I realized that both characteristics were inevitably linked, that each was both result and condition of the other. As stories and gossip of betrayal and loyalty could be found in different time periods of the *población*, I conclude that probably this double-faced condition was not a recent result but a more permanent feature of *pobladores'* sociability. Although I was aware of the many changes that Chileans and the inhabitants of Santiago have suffered over the last 50 years – considering that the *población* was founded in 1957 – I had the intuition that certain social features had remained more or less preserved in these little spaces known as *poblaciones* – entangled alongside the transformations. However, at least two prevalent and accepted ideas clashed with this perspective. Firstly, the oft-shared story regarding *pobladores'* unity, solidarity and incredible organization in the times of the *toma* and during the struggles in the 1980s. Secondly, the analysis of the social effects produced by the introduction of the neoliberal economic model during dictatorship, in terms of consumerism, individualism and modernization. In the context of the *población*, this change would be the cause of the lack of participation, solidarity and political activity that are seen

nowadays. In brief, the new order made *pobladores'* organization and unity impossible. In fact, both ideas are part of the same interpretation of recent Chilean history – supported by academics and *pobladores* – as a movement between politicization and depoliticization, from a state-oriented society towards a market society, from social solidarity to individualism, from responsible citizens to apathetic consumers (Baño 2004, Cousiño and Valenzuela 1994, Lechner 2002, Oxhorn 1991, Posner 1999, Silva 2004).

Could it be possible that this mainstream discourse about the recent history of Chile, accepted by most academics and *pobladores* alike, was not entirely accurate for the *población'*s everyday life? May La Victoria not have been as united in the past as this discourse portrays? May today's *pobladores* not be as individualistic or apathetic as this analysis implies?

During my time in the field I witnessed innumerable scenes of solidarity between neighbours, friends and family. I saw directly how neighbours from my own *cuadra* organized themselves to solve common problems and to help other neighbours with their economic problems. I listened to conversations in which gossip was not used to attack people, but as a form of involving others and intervening in problematic situations in the domestic and public space (as in the example described before of Sra. Adela). I realized that people were completely aware of the main political, economic and social problems of the country, with clear positions and opinions. In general, I witnessed the closeness, trust and affection that people showed each other in everyday life. These solidary scenes can also be found described extensively in Clara Han's contemporary ethnographic account on another Chilean *población*, La Pincoya (Han 2012). All these features were clearly in contradiction with the current interpretation of Chilean social reality as characterized by individualism, consumerism and depoliticization. What had happened in the past?

According to *pobladores'* classic discourse about their past, the condition of the *población* was completely different in two moments of its history: in the times of the *toma* when everyone worked and struggled together to build the *población*; and in the 1980s when again they joined each other to confront dictatorship. In the first case, it was really rare to hear about division and fragmentation, dislike and betrayals. I

thought that probably in this time the *población* had been effectively different. However, one day I was checking one of the first newspapers edited by the local Communist Party in 1959 – after 2 years of the *toma* – called *La Voz de La Victoria* (The Voice of La Victoria). Although the newspaper completed only six editions, in most the problems that people were living through in those times are portrayed, especially the incredible confrontation between the communist group that edited the newspaper and the Catholic community, condensed in the figure of Padre del Corro. In interviews and books about La Victoria's history (GIMP 2006, GSP 1989, GTLV 2007) I had already come across that name, but it was always mentioned to describe his contribution alongside other political and religious figures to the formation of the *población*. On the contrary, in the newspaper, Father del Corro and 'his people' were pictured as selfish rivals, only worried about their own problems and not about the common good of all the *pobladores*. Several months after this discovery, I was interviewing Pilina, a well-known old *pobladora* who participated actively in the *toma*, when she mentioned Father del Corro as one of the most important actors in the *toma*. I remembered what I had read in the newspaper, so I asked her about the priest. She said that he was good, that he helped the community a lot in those times. Then I told her about the newspaper and she fixed her eyes on the ceiling for a while, trying to remember. Finally, she said, 'yes, now I remember that we had lot of problems with the father and especially with Sra. Mercedes, an old Catholic woman who was very problematic. She was always confronting us, but most of the people in that time were communists'.

There are three books that have been written about La Victoria's history following *pobladores'* memories. Two of them were written quite recently (GIMP 2006, GTLV 2007) and one during dictatorship times (GSP 1989). Although all of them portray the same shared mainstream discourse about the past and present of the *población*, in the book from 1989 named *Pasado, Victoria del Presente* (*Past, Victory of the Present*), a quote from a *pobladora* caught my attention:

> Before, when we had our little huts, we shared more, we had more solidarity with each other, we understood each other, but now people get angry for anything, even silly things and one

> retreats and does not want to participate any more… I think people from the old times were closer to each other, and now, what happens to your neighbour is not something you care about so much as before.

As this quote comes from a period which is now considered a time when *pobladores* were very close to each other in the struggles against dictatorship, its discovery made me think if also this story about the past was biased or if people had forgotten the reality of that moment. In a focus group that I conducted in the *población* with the young fighters of the 1980s I asked them about this apparent contradiction. Claudia answered, 'Yes, there were many groups and lots of differences between us. However, we were all together in the same fight, struggling to defeat the dictator'. When people talked about the unity of the *población* during the 1980s, they normally avoided the evident fragmentation of the organizations and groups referring to the *Comité de Pobladores* (*Pobladores'* Committee). This organization was active from 1983 to 1986 and was composed of representatives of most of the organizations (political parties, urban guerrillas, churches, cultural centres, etc.) which were present in the *población* at that time. In a certain way, this umbrella organization was a replica of the committee created at the beginning of the *población* in 1957.

When I heard about this *Pobladores'* Committee I began to doubt my own descriptions and reflections regarding *pobladores*' social fragmentation. So, I sought a person who had participated in the 1980s committee in order to learn how the organization worked. My friend Gabriela was the president of a cultural centre (the major cultural centre in the *población* in those years) and therefore was the representative of her organization in the committee. She told me that most of the organizations in the *población* participated in the committee because, according to her, 'they felt the responsibility to send delegates because everyone wanted to know what happened in the rest of the organizations and the general activities that as a *población* we were going to undertake'. Participation in the committee was voluntary and inside the organization a democratic pattern prevailed (one organization, one delegate, one vote). However, the organizational integration that the installation of this committee could have led to, in practice never happened. Gabriela told me that every organization was autonomous in

relation to the other groups, and that the committee's decisions would not necessarily be followed by any specific organization. In other words, the *Pobladores'* Committee did not have the strength to compel anyone to pursue a particular course of action. Rather, every organization had its own agenda and they could coincidentally follow actions with the others. Any common action was actually many groups' specific decisions coordinated by the committee. Thus, the fragmentation of the *población* (and resentments and dislike between groups) was never overcome but all the groups agreed to come together as the main objective of their agendas was similar.[27]

These are just a few examples of a pattern that I experienced every time that I confronted *pobladores* with their own memories of the past: despite the 'unity story' they always ended up remembering divisions, problems and scenes of selfishness. However, it is impossible to suggest that political participation is similar today as it was in the past. During the 1980s, *pobladores* created a big movement, which was expressed in the extent of their involvement in national protests and other political events (this special time will be described in Chapter 4). My point is that in those moments, the collective action achieved was paradoxically totally unconnected to any kind of unity or an increase in solidarity. In fact, divisions are a permanent and inevitable condition that derive from the scarcity of affection in the *población*. Thus, I consider that it was neither that the past was particularly a time of unity, nor today a time of extreme individualism.

This process of creating a shared and proud memory narrative of 'solidarity, unity and participation' alongside forgetting 'divisions, problems and individualism' cannot be seen as a particular phenomenon only attributable to *pobladores* from La Victoria. Renan (1882) for example, explains how the process of collective forgetting has been a crucial factor in the creation of nations in Europe: '…the essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things" (Renan 1882). Due to its importance, memory has become a central subject of anthropological enquiry, highlighting its selective, unstable,

[27] In 2014, a similar organization, with representatives from different current organizations, was created in La Victoria. The information that I have received is that everything is going well with the new umbrella organization, although they have to permanently confront several tensions between participating groups.

contested and partial character – it does not reproduce an objective past – alongside the fact that it tells much more about the present than about the past – perhaps about a present projected back in time (Argenti & Schramm 2009, Cole 1998, Feuchtwang 2006, Lambeck 2006). Cole (1998) considers that much of this work has been related to the process of remembering and the ways in which people remember either as narratives or as silences, especially in the context of memories of violence and trauma (Argenti & Schramm 2009, Das 2007). On the other hand, Cole describes how people in a small village in Madagascar forget past violent events: separating, erasing and especially incorporating them into local and domestic narratives and beliefs. According to her, 'remembering and forgetting are processes that mutually constitute memory' (Cole 1998: 627).

In Chile, most of the literature on memory has also focused on trauma and the difficulties of assimilating and processing the violent events experienced during dictatorship (Lazzara 2006, Lechner 2002, Lira 2010). Other authors have shown how the Chilean political elite of post-dictatorship have imposed a politics of oblivion regarding a contentious past in order to maintain governance, a political context that has been disrupted at different times over the last 25 years by public events of memory (Moulian 1997, Wilde 1999). Despite this tendency in the literature, I must say that what I found in La Victoria was exactly the opposite. Instead of processes of forgetting or of blocking the repression and violence suffered by *pobladores*, they continually sought to remember, to tell everyone what they had lived through both during dictatorship and the *toma* times. Contrary to Cole's difficulties in reaching the memories of violent events of the past, *pobladores* continually expressed an excess of memory regarding these kinds of events. In fact, when I talked to them about the past – because generally they wanted to do so – they used to refer insistently to the dictatorship and the *toma*, but did not have much to say regarding other historical periods (before the 1980s, after the 1990s, etc.). This can be seen in the books on memory written by the *pobladores* themselves (GIMP 2006, GSP 1989, GTLV 2007). Most of the times when we were talking about the past, they asked me 'Why do you want to know my story?' And, after telling his/her story, would say, 'You should go to talk to person X who was tortured or lost kin'. Thus, those who suffered the most are considered to be the legitimate representatives of La Victoria´s past. In short,

*pobladores* do not want to forget but to remember (for more, see Chapter 5). However, this excess of memory on violence, repression and collective struggle has tended to erase not only memories regarding other times, but also the everyday conditions of those epic times in the *población*. In my opinion, this is the reason why they have developed this mythic narrative of 'solidarity unity, and participation' for the past. Moreover, if we agree that memory is more related to the present than to the past (Argenti & Schramm 2009, Feuchtwang 2006), we can understand as well why this narrative makes so much sense to *pobladores* nowadays. As we saw in the introductory vignette of this chapter, *pobladores* consider La Victoria to be divided today, and see people as selfish and highly individualistic (but they also can see solidarity and participation, the other face of the *población*). Therefore, if they are currently unable to produce the political results that were produced in the past, probably it is because that past was different. Perhaps – they seem to think – the *población* was more united and solidary than in this fragmented present.

## Chapter 3: The Party and the *población*

The history of La Victoria seems to be undoubtedly linked to left-wing political groups and especially to the Communist Party. In fact, all the books that have addressed, in general, the history of the *pobladores'* movement in Chile, and those written by *pobladores* themselves or by other researchers regarding La Victoria in particular, have highlighted the important role played by the Communist Party in the *toma* – illegal land occupation – that led to the formation of the *población* in 1957 (Cortés 2014, Espinoza 1988, Farias 1989, Garcés 2002, GIMP 2003, GSP 1989, GTLV 2007). According to all my friends and other older informants with whom I talked during my fieldwork, there were only two political parties properly involved in the *toma*: the Communist Party and the Socialist Party. However, everyone agreed that the socialists were a clear minority and that most leaders of the *población* over the first years and throughout its history 'have always belonged to the Communist Party'.

In the same vein, a study conducted by Schneider (1992, 1995) in several *poblaciones* of Santiago at the end of the dictatorship (1989-1990) seems to confirm the communist preponderance in La Victoria by that time as well. Schneider argues that although the fall of the dictatorship was fundamentally a consequence of the 1980s protest cycle in which *pobladores* had a preponderant role, not all *poblaciones* had the same participation and commitment to the political struggle. Presenting her evidence, Schneider divides *poblaciones* into three different types: low mobilized *poblaciones* (such as Villa Wolf) in which there is no record of protests; sporadically combative *poblaciones* (such as Sara Gajardo and Villa O´Higgins) where protests were observed in specific moments, particularly when they had a national character; and highly mobilized *poblaciones* (Yungay and La Victoria among others) in which the struggles were massive and permanent. Trying to explain these differences, Schneider concludes that the central element distinguishing the highly mobilized *poblaciones* was the important presence of militants from the Communist Party (Schneider 1995).

The perception of the pre-eminence of the communist activists during the 1980s in La Victoria can also be noted in the stories that communist and some non-communist *pobladores* tell nowadays when they remember the protest years. According to these stories, by that time the number of communist militants and activists had increased

enormously in the *población* and this was reflected in the number and diversity of communist groups, ranging from cultural centres, youth groups, political cells, etc., to local armed groups and some less visible members of the FPMR guerrilla group. My friend Rosa (53), who used to belong to another political and armed left-wing group called MIR (*Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario* – Revolutionary Leftist Movement), confirmed the difficulties that other political groups had at that time in increasing their members and expanding their influence in La Victoria. She told me that although there were several people from the *población* in MIR, they decided to concentrate their political activities in other nearby *poblaciones* – *poblaciones* Cardenal Caro and Lo Valledor – because, especially in the latter, 'there was nothing there. People from Lo Valledor needed to become organized and we went to work there. But also here in La Victoria there were the communists who filled all the space and had political control. This *población* has always been very communist'.

Despite this widespread perception regarding the preponderance of the Communist Party in La Victoria´s history, there are other versions of history that have tended to question its role. According to Chilean historian Gabriel Salazar, an action such as the *toma* that lay at the origin of La Victoria – and is also considered the starting point of the *pobladores*' movement in Chile – implicated an exercise of creativity and a disposition to illegality that transformed 'the way of doing politics of the popular class'. This new way clashed precisely with the legalist and controlling character of formal political parties – including the Communist Party. Thus, beyond the eventual fact that the *toma* leaders could have belonged to this party, the '*toma* was congenitally developing practises and self-management capabilities that did not fit, in essence, with the militant hierarchical discipline that operated in unions and political parties' (Salazar 2012: 181). This paradox has been also noted by another historian, Mario Garcés, for whom, despite the involvement and leadership of communist militants in La Victoria's *toma* (and other later urban *tomas*), the Communist Party did not consider *pobladores* as a political target and they were instead conceptualized as 'young workers' or a 'politically backward mass'. 'In consequence,' Garcés says, 'the Communist Party was "in the practice" beside *pobladores*, but only very weakly on a theoretical and discursive level' (Garcés 2002: 147). Perhaps for this reason, although the popular insurrection against the dictatorship was expected and promoted by the

Communist Party, the centrality of *pobladores* in the struggles over the 1980s was a very surprising event and the Party[28] continued to consider *pobladores* as simple workers, lacking a political strategy directed towards *poblaciones* (Alvarez 2011).

This controversy seems to suggest the existence of a radical difference between the Party understood as a formal institution and the militants or groups of communists that have inhabited La Victoria until today. Who then are these communist *pobladores*? What are their differences with the Party? Moreover, if the *poblaciones* were never a political target for the Party, how can we explain the success of communist ideas in penetrating and reproducing themselves among *pobladores* throughout La Victoria´s history – more than any other political ideology? To answer these questions, I will recount some of the numerous stories that current and former communists told me and the experiences that I lived directly with the only current active communist group in the *población*, in which I was deeply involved during fieldwork.

In this chapter, I will argue that the expression of communist ideas in the *población* – either in the past or today – has been reshaped following the everyday dynamics of the political economy of affection that I have been describing in previous chapters. Thus, being a communist person in the *población* does not rest on the individual assertion of any specific ideological content, principle or political orientation promoted by the Party – orientations that in fact have changed through history – but in the net of relationships (kinship and friendship) in which the person is inscribed within the *población*. Using the example of the communists, in what follows I will show how ideology is transformed into an ethical model for *pobladores*' behaviour in their everyday lives and through this, into a principle of distinction that separates communists from other groups. This on-the-ground transformation will allow us to understand as well the success that communist ideas have historically had in reproducing themselves among groups and generations in the *población*. But, at the same time, it will show the limitations faced by the communist groups in politically encompassing a *población* in which they are considered just one group among many others. As I stated before, even in those moments when communists achieved a contingent hegemonic position (for example, in the 1980s' struggles), people from

[28] I will use 'the Party' to refer to the Communist Party, as *pobladores* themselves do.

other groups would hardly consider that their combative actions were related to communist politics and, in the case of the communists themselves, more than forming a united or cohesive structure, they became fragmented into numerous groups at times opposed to each other. Nowadays, although these communist groups from the 1980s no longer exist, their former members have maintained the personal quarrels and differences – characteristics of the political economy of affection – that divided them during that time.

## Stories of communists

### A. The old communist man, an image

In an interview with one of my informants, Juan (51), a former communist inactive today, we started to talk about the problem of drugs and drug dealing in the *población*.[29] Like many other people that I met in La Victoria, Juan had the same theory about drugs: drugs have always existed in the *población,* but it became a problem when *pasta base* (crack or coca paste) appeared in the early-1990s. Due to the fact that this drug arrived in the *población* exactly at the end of dictatorship and at the beginning of the democratic transition, logic suggests that it was introduced deliberately by external agents – probably from the government, but nobody knows – in order to weaken popular movements and to destroy social and political organizations in *poblaciones*. After Juan told me this popular theory regarding drugs, he continued: 'We were very soft with this problem, because we saw it coming and we should have stopped at that moment. Now it's too late, they have taken almost all the *población*'. And with 'they' he meant the drug gangs. Then he thought out loud, 'If my father were alive, he would just go, take his guns and he would just shoot them away. He did that for less serious things. This problem is something that cannot be happening. We allow it!'

[29] Many communist activists of the 1980s and further back are nowadays inactive, which means that they do not participate in any formal structure of the Party. Although most of them have strong criticisms concerning the current state of the Party, many still consider themselves as communists. This reveals that being a communist in the *población* is not primarily related to formal membership but to biographic ties that people have developed with other communists in the *población*. This will be an important part of the argument of this chapter. For the differences between active and inactive communists – and other political activists – see Chapter 5.

This mention of his father was not coincidental. More than to represent a particular family anecdote or a specific feature of his father, Juan was portraying a common image of how an old communist behaves. An old communist, like his father, would never have allowed people to take advantage of others (selling drugs to young people from the *población* and using them as soldiers) and to put people in danger because of shootings and gang quarrels, just for money. Following his father´s image, Juan tried to form an armed group in the mid-1990s in order to confront drug gangs directly. However, many communists opposed the idea arguing that gangs were also *pobladores* ('among them there are family and friends') and that many people – especially innocent people – could die in the fray.

During the time that I lived in her house, Amanda, another inactive former communist, told me the story many times of how her family arrived in the *población*. Her parents were living on the north side of the city as *allegados* in her grandparents' house.[30] One of their three daughters (Amanda's sister) had already been born. One day, her uncle, Sergio Mori, went to visit her mother, Paloma, to tell her that a *toma* had taken place in the south part of the city, and that he had a site, a piece of land for her family. Although Amanda's mother was pregnant, she did not think long about it and made the decision to move there. On the contrary, her father, Pancho, was sceptical of the *toma* and refused to move in. So, one day, Paloma just picked up her stuff, put everything in a tumbril, took her baby and moved to the *toma*. Sergio Mori helped her with the move and she was installed that day in the place where their home would be for the rest of her life. A couple of weeks later, Pancho showed up and moved in with her. And, after two months, Amanda was born in *población* La Victoria.

Every time Amanda told me this story, she always finished by talking about Sergio Mori, one of the best people she has ever met. She used to say: 'Uncle Sergio was incredible, a gentleman. He was one of the leaders of the *toma.* He helped the people so much. And he did not leave any site for himself. He worked for free, just because he was committed to the people'. But Sergio Mori was also an old communist,

[30] *Allegados* is the Chilean word used to refer to a family that is forced to live at another family's house – frequently the house of the parent of one of the partners – because of the lack of their own house.

according to Amanda 'honest, warm, with a great temperament, devoted, committed to the fight against injustices, as any real communist should be'.[31]

Taken as random examples, Juan's father and Sergio Mori represent not only an image from the past or a simple memory, but fundamentally a role model for the present. In different conversations with several active and inactive communists I could note that all of them mentioned 'the old communist ones' as a common resource, especially when they needed to support an opinion or make an important decision. Thus, all my communist friends – as probably Juan´s father and Sergio Mori themselves had – have their own old communist image on whom to model their actions. In short, this image is basically the reservoir of what constitutes being and behaving as a communist. Because of this image, communists can distinguish right from wrong, good from bad. It was probably due to the incongruence between reality and this image that Amanda was always complaining about some people of the Municipality (local council) who, according to her, 'are not committed to the people, they cannot treat people badly. I could understand if these people were from another party, but they are comrades, they are supposedly communists. This is completely insane'.

**B. The battle against drugs**

For everyone in La Victoria, while the 1980s was the time of struggle against the dictatorship, the 1990s was the time of drugs. Today the problem persists but has become part of the everyday life of the *población*. However, when massive drug dealing appeared and drug gangs started to confront each other, people were so shocked and afraid that they could not properly react. After the initial shock, some people felt a duty to do something to solve the problem (at least in its most extreme consequences). The following story was told to me by its main character, Gloria Rodríguez (58), a communist *pobladora* and a current councillor of the Municipality, and I could corroborate some parts and details with other people.

In the mid-1990s, Gloria Rodríguez was president of La Victoria´s neighbourhood council. To her ears came the news that 'Los Molina' gang, one of the most powerful

[31] A small square with children's games and bearing his name inside *población* La Victoria has a little monument dedicated to Sergio Mori's memory.

and dangerous drug gangs in the *población,* were charging cars and people a toll to pass through the street in which they operated. After a moment, she decided to go there and talk to them. Arriving at the place she realized that they had two cars parked across the street. Gloria ordered, 'Move these cars from here right now and stop bothering people!' Immediately, 15 men appeared with guns, surrounding her. One of them said, 'Are you kidding, do you want to die?' Gloria internally trembled, looking at those very dangerous men pointing guns at her. They had already killed for less than what she was doing. She exclaimed again, 'You feel so brave with a gun in your hand, but you are just rubbish. You sell your shit here contaminating our young people. Move all this stuff now'. One of the guys answered, 'It looks like some old woman is going to die today. I am going to kill you'. In that moment, Gloria understood that if she wanted to leave the place alive, she needed to be more dangerous and braver than them. If she showed even a slight sign of weakness they were going to kill her. So, she replied:

> If you do not move everything from here, I am going to call many of my friends from Frente [FPMR], from MIR and Lautaro [other guerrillas] and we are going to blow your house and destroy all that you have, we are going to kill all your family and friends in three generations. And you know that we can do it if we want. You know we still have many arsenals. So, move everything right now.

She finalized her speech internally terrified but without showing anything outwards. She was also aware that she did not have any arsenal and, apart from some retired people from FPMR she knew, she did not have any contact with members from the aforementioned guerrillas. Finally, Gloria turned and left. The men from the drug gang did not say or do anything.

A week later, Gloria was walking on the street when a person stopped her. It was the top boss of the gang, Claudio Molina, who had not been present at the moment that Gloria had confronted his gang. He wanted to apologize to her for the attitude of his group and to promise her that they would never cut the street in that way again. But she did not have any intention putting up with any of their behaviour. Gloria had understood that when you deal with drug gangs you must be – or make them believe

you are – braver and more powerful than them. This is the only thing that they respect. But, also, that if you permit even a small thing from them – starting from their existence itself – you are endorsing everything that follows. According to Gloria, dealing drugs is always something bad and you need to reject it radically, otherwise you would be accepting everything. Consequently, Gloria answered, 'I will never cease to confront you. I will only be happy when you stop selling that shit in my *población* and get out of here. Never talk to me again'.

From that moment, the *población* started to live in a rarefied atmosphere. It was as if it was a pre-war period. In the following weeks, Gloria and her family constantly received death threats. In fact, the drug dealers had put a price on Gloria's and Claudina's heads.[32] Friends and family did not allow Gloria or Claudina to walk alone on the *población* anymore. Meanwhile, several people from the Communist Party (and ex-members from the FPMR) started to reunite and create an armed group to deal with the inevitable confrontation. But Gloria and Claudina vigorously opposed any armed action. To them, this would have meant a slaughter, a river of blood in the *población*. Due to threats from both sides but no actual actions, the situation was extending in time and was slowly calming down. However, Gloria and Claudina had initiated a crusade in order to try to solve the problem in a different way. Due to the corruption of La Victoria's police centre, they went directly to the Ministry of Justice to request an external intervention from the police force in the *población*. At the same time, the neighbourhood and local council started a psychosocial intervention with many programmes and projects directed towards children and young people in order to create awareness of drugs as something bad.

This narration exemplifies how difficult it is for any *poblador* to draw the boundary between good and bad things, right and wrong actions, and how important it is to have a strong ethical code of conduct amid the imponderables of everyday life. Facing a terrible dilemma, Gloria had to choose between her personal security and her values as a communist person and leader. With her actions and words, she showed not only

[32] Claudina Nuñez (61) is a communist politician and current mayor of the Municipality of Pedro Aguirre Cerda district, where La Victoria is located. She and Gloria have built their political careers together, and they became the main leaders of the *población* after dictatorship.

the extreme strength of her values and principles but also that this strength rested on a more broadly shared distinction – already existent in the *población* – and not merely on her personal convictions. The 'pre-war' situation that the *población* lived through afterwards, clearly demonstrated that the issue was beyond her. In fact, this problem particularly affected many former combatants of the 1980s who, after the return to democracy in 1990, became either drug dealers or addicts. For this reason, I think Gloria was basically trying to redraw a line: drug gangs and drugs in general are opposed to communist values – they are part of the enemies that communists have to confront and defeat.

### C. A rugged path

During the 1980s, like many young people in those years, Manuel (53) was involved in the uprising movement of *pobladores* against the dictatorship. Through a friend, Manuel began to participate in political meetings disguised as religious activities in La Victoria´s Catholic church, in which *pobladores* discussed the political situation that the country was going through. After a while, some friends from this group recruited him for the MIR and he started to take part in clandestine meetings and some political armed actions, especially in other *poblaciones*. He was very much involved in these activities until he met Amanda, who would become his wife some time later. Under Amanda´s influence, Manuel changed his militancy to the Communist Party, which is, even today, a strange and always contentious move in La Victoria due to the known rivalry between these groups. As a communist militant, Manuel started to participate in local clashes against the police and the military and was part of a communist cultural centre in which Amanda also participated. In an ascending line of responsibilities inside the local communist group, during the 1980s Manuel received military training and participated in armed *recuperaciones* (recoveries) and other actions that forced him to spend several months towards the end of dictatorship hidden (clandestine) because the military force was looking for him.[33]

[33] A *recuperación* or recovery is the word used by political armed groups that seeks to transform the sense of the action of stealing into a political act of recovering something that always should have belonged to the people (*el pueblo*).

As for everyone in the *población*, the change from dictatorship to transitional democracy seemed, on the surface, to Manuel like it did not mean anything for his everyday life. According to several friends, military repression was, in fact, maintained in the *población* for some years after the return to democracy in 1990. However, in reality a monumental change was operating in the *población* and the country: a complete era was falling apart, leaving broken dreams and lost hopes. Thus, although the dictatorship had finally been defeated, the price that the 1980s combatants – like Manuel – had to pay was incredibly high. Suddenly, everything that they believed in and the reasons for which they had risked their lives had gone. As many of them told me during fieldwork, they had also been defeated. They could not make sense of this new environment, as if trapped in another time, like ghosts, they were unable to understand the new world of the living ones.

While many of them faced depression and other mental illnesses as the result of this change (see Chapter 5), other combatants, like Manuel, fell into drug consumption. Thus, he became addicted to *pasta base* and alcohol. During the first years, however, he had the ability to hide his situation from Amanda and the rest of his family. But one day in the mid-1990s, one of Manuel's sisters went to Amanda's house and told her that Manuel was using drugs. Although Amanda had suspicions that something strange was happening, she had never imagined that it could be a drug issue. She was shocked. As a communist family, they were totally against drugs and drug gangs and Amanda therefore interpreted that other friends had influenced Manuel to change his behaviour. After this, the problem markedly increased and Manuel, no longer with anything to hide, surrendered completely to his addiction. Knowing Manuel, I can imagine the shame he must have felt as a proud communist and fighter of the 1980s.

After the shock, Amanda got involved in the problem and helped him. He was admitted to a rehabilitation centre for several months to treat his addiction. Later, he left this centre, but after a year he again fell into drug consumption. In that time, Amanda had been participating in an Evangelical Protestant church (Amanda parents' church) and she took Manuel there. After a time of attending regularly to church, Manuel began to leave his problem completely behind, and he even stopped drinking alcohol and

smoking cigarettes. Several years passed and a strong Manuel left the church and started to participate again in local politics and the Communist Party.

This life story is illustrative of the way in which communist ideas have been inscribed in *pobladores*' lives. Firstly, we can see that Manuel´s membership in the Catholic church group, MIR, the Communist Party and even the evangelical church was the result of the network of relationships that Manuel was developing through time. In fact, during my fieldwork I asked all my communist friends, but also random people whom I met, why they participated or had participated in one group or another. In absolutely all the cases, the most important factor was that one or more members of their family or friends were already involved in these groups and that they were invited by these people because of the sentimental connection that they had. Secondly, this story shows as well that being a communist person – or a catholic, evangelic, etc. – implies affirming and sharing with other communists a set of values or an ethical distinction for everyday life. For the communist *pobladores* during the 1980s, these values led them to fight fiercely against the military apparatus of the dictatorship, even risking their lives (see Chapter 4). However, when the political context changed, in the case of Manuel and other combatants, all their convictions began to become confused in their minds. Manuel did not even have the power to stop using drugs, something that was not a problem for him even in the 1980s. It is also quite enlightening that it was a church that helped him recover his distinctions and the strength to follow them. Thus, the answer was not his political beliefs or the rehabilitation centre´s therapies but a new community, a new group with a new moral code, something strong to believe in again.

**Communism as a moral force**

Whenever we think about a political ideology such as communism, we usually concentrate our definitions on aspects of content, namely, the critical analysis regarding the contradictions of capitalist society and its proposal to overcome class struggle and build a new order free of contradictions (as we can see from Marx´s *Communist Manifest* onwards). Hence, a communist person would be someone who supports this specific and almost immovable project – a set of ideas about the socioeconomic reality and a view regarding how the world should be. However, when

we penetrate into the actual lives of communist *pobladores*, we can see that communism is rather experienced in their everyday life as a shared ethical framework that allows them to make distinctions and judge between good and bad decisions, right and wrong behaviours. The stories I presented before serve to illustrate that behind communist opinions, actions and decisions in life there always lies an implicit – and very often explicit – search for discernment regarding what would be the proper communist position to hold or path to follow. Thus, this ethical expression of communism was fully present in both Juan´s opinion about drug gangs and Amanda´s critical perception on the behaviour of council officials. Similarly, Gloria´s performance facing the gang and Manuel´s political activities during the 1980s could be also seen as practical expressions of the same on-the-ground form of communism.

In other words, when we delve into *pobladores*' everyday lives it becomes evident that communism is transformed from a political/ideological project into a particular 'ordinary ethics', following a concept developed by Lambek (2010) and Das (2012) among others. Although it may seem trivial, this distinction is of the utmost importance: while, in the project version, the contents are fundamental to define the 'ends', the ethical version instead does not pursue an end 'but exhausts its full meaning in the performance itself' (Arendt quoted in Lambek 2010). As my communist friends told me on several occasions during formal meetings and informal conversations, 'A communist should be the best in every aspect of life, the most honest, correct and committed person'. Therefore, being a communist person in the *población* is not lived as an instrumental means to an end but as an expression of everyday communist ethical distinctions.

Based on the conversations and lived experiences during fieldwork with my communist friends, I would suggest that this transformation of communism into an ordinary ethic has been possible precisely because the very existence of communist *pobladores* through time has not rested on an individual assertion of specific contents or political principles but on the ordinary ties that bind people together in the *población*. We can see this perfectly in these stories of communists. For example, what directly influenced Juan's and Amanda's views about how to confront drug gangs and evaluate council officials, respectively, were the images of specific old communist

people – friends and/or family – that they kept in their minds. In the same vein, the strength and conviction shown by Gloria when she confronted the gang and the life decisions made by Manuel were the results of their relationships with other communists (and probably with their own images of the old communist ones). Thus, not only was my friends' membership as communists a product of their social relationships (family and/or friends) but, also, the moral distinctions drawn to make judgments or to act in different circumstances of life. These distinctions were traced through actual relationships of affection with other communists (dead or alive). In a very generalizing tone, Keane has noted that any starting point for a reflection of the ethical must be to consider the fact that we not only 'live among other people' but rather that 'we come to be who we are within, and by virtue of, relationships with others, their bodies, their possessions, their languages, their ways of inhabiting our imaginations and emotions' (Keane 2010: 66).

The perception that the communist ethic emanates from social relationships does not mean that all the communists in the *población* share at all times the same definitions of what means to be 'the best in every aspect of life' or 'how a communist should behave under X circumstances´. Lambek (2010) has pointed out that normally 'ethics is relatively tacit´ and that only in some situations does it become explicit. Although from my experience among communist *pobladores* I may agree with this observation, I think that the explicit moments, for them, are more common than Lambek is thinking. Thus, for example, I have already mentioned that, during the 1980s, communists in the *población* divided into numerous groups. These groups, as any group in the *población*, were based on relationships marked by affection among their members. But, while all shared the imperative of fighting dictatorship, each group held different definitions of 'how a communist should do that'. Therefore, their actions went from direct armed struggle against military forces to educational workshops or cultural expression (such as wall painting) in order to develop awareness among *pobladores* of the political situation. In this case, the ethical distinctions that separated the groups were explicit, they were absolutely conscious of their differences – differences that divide them until today. Similarly, the stories of communists that I have been analysing show diverse responses to the problem of drugs over the hard times lived by *pobladores* after 1990. Confronted with a new political reality, many communists became drug addicts (like

Manuel) or fell into depression. Other considered armed confrontation with drug gangs (such as Juan). And, finally, some decided to oppose the problem of drugs, demanding intervention from the state (Gloria and Claudina). Despite these differences, in all these cases, as in those of the 1980s, the responses were not a product of individual reasoning but relied upon ethical distinctions shared and built with other communists.

Zigon (2014) has elaborated a strong critique to the concept of 'ordinary ethics' as it is proposed by Lambek and others. His central point is that in the process of taking the transcendental dimension away from the concept of ethics or morality and attaching it into ordinary experiences (especially, but not only, into language), ordinary ethicists have dissolved 'the ethical into the social'. They have done so by replacing the word 'social' for 'ethical', through considering the ethical – or being a moral subject – as immanent to everyday life everywhere, which is for Zigon, another form of Kantian transcendentalism. Zigon argues that this contradiction could be overcome by considering ethics not as immanent to or inseparable from social life, but as 'responses to singular and particular ways of being, and those situations which either allow or disrupt our ability to dwell in a world' (2014: 753). Similarly, when I propose that communism is transformed into a particular ordinary ethic in the *población*, rather than arguing in favour of a more or less universal ethical phenomenon by equating ethical with social, I am considering the special features of being-in-a-world such as the *población*. As I have described throughout this thesis, the *población*'s social life is markedly sentimental: it is full of groups with strong bonds of affection between their members and also strong separations and divisions with others. In this world, affection is considered something scarce and, therefore, this valuable good should be appropriately distributed in few hands and not wasted in many. This assumption configures a particular regime that underlies all social life, which I have called a political economy of affection. Thus, the transformation of communism into an ordinary ethic is not based on any immanence of the ethical but is a result of the ubiquitous political economy of affection in the *población*. Under this regime, and confronted with the uncertainties of everyday life or with 'the disruption of their abilities to dwell in their world', paraphrasing Zigon, communists and *pobladores* in general have rested upon others or built with others the ethical distinctions to decide and act in life and to maintain those decisions and action through time.

Finally, when we look at La Victoria's history we can depict communism in general as a moral force that, beyond the contents and the people involved, has, through relationships of affection, permanently maintained its influence over *pobladores*. As my friend Rosa told me, 'this *población* has always been very communist'. However, since the foundation of the *población*, communists have also had to coexist with and relate to other moral forces, which is the general form that other ideologies, under the regime of a political economy of affection, have also assumed in the *población*. Thus, alongside the communists, the most enduring and strongest ordinary ethic in the *población* has been represented by the Catholic *pobladores*. But we can also mention the important presence and influence – intermittently in different times – of Evangelical churches, criminal groups, drug gangs and other political parties or tendencies, such as socialists, anarchists, Christian democrats, and the MIR guerrilla, among many others. Although the unstable existence of these other moral forces – except the Catholic one – demonstrates the limitations that communists have always faced in encompassing the whole *población* – due to the fact that their strength comes from the closeness with some and separation from others – they also show the extent of the success of communists to endure, despite the political and social changes in the *población* and the country through almost 60 years. What then has distinguished communism from other moral forces? Why has the communist ethic been so effective in La Victoria in maintaining its influence over *pobladores* more so than other ordinary ethics? In what follows I will try to answer these questions showing that communism's success has been linked to two general features of the Communist Party's modus operandi: the unity of action and the discipline. Paradoxically, in the final part of this chapter we will see that this correspondence between the Party's praxis and the *población´*s everyday life rather than aligning both spaces has produced an incredible separation and disconnect between them.

**The unity of action**

On the 4th of February 2014, Venezuela began to experience a series of protests directed against Nicolas Maduro's socialist government – Maduro was the successor to Chavez after his death. As usual, most of the news transmitted by international agencies and Chilean TV channels (all of which belong to the right-wing) sought to

convey the idea that Venezuela was living under a dictatorship and that the government attempted against protesters' human rights. They transmitted very biased information, showing a country in which most of the people seemed unhappy and repressed by the military forces.

One morning in the following week I was taking breakfast with Manuel when he turned on the television and tuned to TeleSur, a regional channel that belongs to several governments in Latin America but especially to Venezuela. Naturally, Telesur was transmitting news on the protests and the whole crisis that the country was going through but from an entirely different point of view from that of Chilean TV channels and international agencies (such as CNN). Through interviews with people on the streets and with experts on international politics, through images of violent protests against the regime and of pacific manifestations in support of the Venezuelan government, Telesur was portraying the crisis as a political complot of the USA and the local right-wing parties to destabilize the country. Journalists referred to the situation as a slow coup d'état: the protesters were people armed and financed by opposition forces, and international and national companies were receiving international support (from USA and Colombia) to hide merchandise and reduce production in order to generate a shortage in basic goods. Meanwhile, the government, which was not in any case responsible for the crisis, was trying to implement measures to control the violence on the streets, to ensure security for the population and to compel companies to increase their production and reduce the prices.

I spent a couple of hours watching Telesur. As one of the last Latin American socialist experiments (at least in discourse) I wanted to be informed about what was really happening in Venezuela. But I quickly started to doubt Telesur's information. It seemed that they were transmitting the same partial information as other TV channels but in exactly the opposite direction: while on CNN the Venezuelan government was actually presented as a dictatorship and Maduro as a violent dictator, in Telesur the government was a victim of US international politics and Maduro, a saint and a saviour of the country. Thus, there was no nuance in any of the information. Moreover, it seemed very hard to believe the idea that the Venezuelan government, with all its

military and communicational power, was not even slightly responsible for the crisis and the violence.

During lunch, I mentioned my perspective to Manuel. He looked at me very upset and answered, 'It surprises me that you think so. What is happening in Venezuela is the same thing that happened in Chile during Allende's government. They are creating the conditions for a coup d'état, and telling a completely fake story to the world about what is going on there'. I replied that I was criticizing Telesur and that I needed to be there to know what was really happening in the country. But Manuel seemed completely sure about his position:

> You are doubting, which is the worst thing you can do. The same thing happened with Allende: people doubted the process, showing a weakness that the right-wing used to take over the country [through the coup d'état in 1973]. You cannot doubt because if you do so you are benefiting the rich and the right-wing. Basically, you are acting as a fascist.

I felt a little perplexed after this conversation. How could I not doubt the information if it seemed so evidently partial? How can I blindly trust in something so clearly biased? At night, I invited some communist friends to my house to share a barbeque. During the conversation, I told them again my perspective regarding the information from Telesur and my doubts about what was actually happening in Venezuela. I wanted to contrast Manuel's answer with my other friends' positions. Surprisingly, everyone agreed with Manuel's perspective, and they talked extensively about the Venezuelan crisis as a product of US intervention and about the heroic government's answer. Finally, they finished by mocking me about my doubts and asking me if I was becoming *amarillo* (literally 'yellow', a derogatory way to say 'moderate'), or if my experience living in La Victoria was going to change me up to the point of supporting right-wing ideas. While they were laughing, I was wondering how very intelligent people like them could accept this information uncritically, believing something in a way that was so hard for me. Their confident opinions, however, rather than appearing as non-reflexive or pre-reflexive, seemed to be composed by another form of rationality. In short, they were expressing as their opinion something that had already

been sanctioned by the Party and therefore the fact that all of them shared the same position was not a coincidence but something completely expected and necessary.

**The discipline**

On the first Friday night of October, my communist friends and I started the weekly cell meeting in the communist cultural centre in La Victoria by talking about the national political news. We were informed that the community centre would be used for the election campaign by the communist brigades and that a poster of Bachelet's propaganda would be installed over the front door, something which bothered most of my friends. Later, we complained about the difficulties that the use of the community centre by the brigades could bring to the upcoming cell activities planned several weeks previously for October: a homage to the memory of La Victoria's *pobladores* killed by the military during dictatorship and the *población*'s anniversary activities in which our cultural centre – formed by the same people as the cell – would participate. Finally, we finished the meeting by distributing roles and talking about dates on which we should meet to prepare the activities.


Figure 3-1: Front wall of the Communist Party' community centre in La Victoria (author's photo)

The meeting was finishing earlier than usual, at 11pm, but as we stood up from our seats suddenly Carmen (47) asked to speak about something important. So, we returned to our seats and she started a speech that, though we did not know at the beginning, would quickly become a lively discussion lasting three hours. Looking back, this debate would transform into one of the most revealing experiences of my fieldwork, containing several levels of analysis. Carmen's speech was related to a problem she was experiencing in her job in the Municipality. Another member of the cell, Gonzalo (37), who worked with her in the same department of the Municipality but in a different social programme, had denounced authority abuse and wage inequality to the high authorities of the Municipality. Gonzalo had been complaining about his situation for several months with members of the cell (including myself), and finally he had decided to denounce the problem with all the consequences that this attitude risked bringing upon him. Basically, Gonzalo and others received less than half the wage of other co-workers at the same level for the same work and his boss exploited her subordinates, forcing them to work overtime and privileging some workers over others. Although the complaint had been positive for Gonzalo's current situation, as he had not been fired and he and some of his co-workers would start to receive the same wage as the rest, this incident had led authorities to question the entire programme in which Gonzalo was working. Some people in the Municipality were talking (as gossip) that the programme would be closed, the boss would be transferred to another department (because the boss had a permanent contract and could not be fired) and the rest of the workers (including Gonzalo) would be fired from their jobs. Therefore, in her speech, an angry Carmen (whose job was not in danger) tried to show us that Gonzalo's actions would cause the layoff of several people who needed their jobs for their and their families' survival. In other words, Carmen was looking for a verbal moral reprimand from the cell members towards Gonzalo because, according to her, 'every communist should be the best at their work, the most honest, committed to the job and involved with the rest of the workers. But Gonzalo had done wrong in trying to solve the problem without considering others'.

After Carmen's speech, it was Gonzalo's turn. He started to tell of innumerable situations in which he and his co-workers were exploited and mistreated by his boss and none of them were able to denounce this behaviour for fear of being fired. Also,

he spoke about the differences in wage as something managed by the boss in order to benefit her friends and to control the rest of her subordinates. He said that everyone in that Municipality department, including Carmen, knew about this situation of labour precariousness and if he did not take action no one would. Finally, for him, his complaint was an act of justice towards the workers and also a proof of commitment to the Municipality because the work itself was being affected due to this negative environment.

After having spent long hearing both sides, all the members of the cell started to talk one by one. Unanimously, everyone agreed with Gonzalo's position and supported his action. Ernesto (21), for instance, said that 'Chilean workers have forgotten the importance of fighting for their rights. Now all that you see are *acomodos* [arrangements] and fear. If every worker behaves as comrade Gonzalo did, this country would be a completely different place…' Carmen answered trying to explain herself further, but her argument became more and more contradictory and incomprehensible. Anyway, it was already impossible to change the shared verdict: Gonzalo had acted as a proper communist, struggling against injustice, committed to his work and to the rest of the workers. All the consequences of his act were not his responsibility but measures that depended on the Municipality. The meeting finished with a generalized apology because we had not supported him when he initially told us about what was happening in his work place. After this meeting, Carmen never came back to participate in the cell and cultural centre.

It took me some time to tie up all the pieces in order to understand what had happened that night. I had to talk separately with several members of the cell and to connect some situations that I had previously seen or heard of. To sum up, Carmen's argument sounded contradictory because she tried to present Gonzalo's actions as something incompatible with the idea that a communist should be the best in every aspect of life (including work). However, everyone disagreed with her, not because this was an unrelated matter to a political cell, but because Gonzalo had fought for the worker's rights which are at the core of any worker's party such as the Communist Party. The problem was that in her speech she omitted a fundamental point: everyone at her work was saying (as gossip) that Gonzalo was lazy. I had received this information months

earlier when another member of the cell saw Gonzalo playing with his son in the park during work hours (a piece of gossip that surely created or consolidated what people thought about Gonzalo). However, due to the nature of Gonzalo's work (more freelance), I did not realize that this little encounter would have such great transcendence. Therefore, what Carmen was really trying to communicate during the meeting was that Gonzalo did not have the moral integrity because of his laziness to put at risk the jobs of people who really needed them and who were more committed to it than him. Thus, Gonzalo's actions were selfish because he was not really looking for justice but was just trying to get more money from a job that he was not interested in and also because he had agreed on the wage when he accepted the job.

When I discovered this fact, it helped me make sense of another situation from the past. Exactly one week before this controversial meeting, the weekly cell reunion had been cancelled after I has already arrived. Other people who had not received the information also showed up, among them Gonzalo and Carmen. In that occasion, both had a conversation that lasted for more than one hour in which I participated intermittently (I spent some time talking with other people who were there, and also both of them seemed uninterested in talking to me). They were discussing the same situation from their work. Although I did not give complete attention to their conversation, basically Carmen was trying to convince him to follow a certain course of action. In other words, she was using informal channels (peer-to-peer), based on their common militancy in the same cell but especially on their friendship, to persuade him to behave in a specific way. Contrary to Carmen's wishes, Gonzalo did exactly the opposite during the week in denouncing his labour situation to the Municipality's authorities. For Carmen, Gonzalo's actions were undisciplined and must receive a moral reprimand from the rest of the cell's members. Basically, during the controversial meeting she was formally invoking, and therefore making explicit, one of the features of the Communist Party: the faculty to control other members' actions and decisions by their peers.

**The unity and the two Parties**

As a reminder, throughout this chapter I have been arguing that communist ideas have kept their presence and influence in the *población* since its foundation due to an

automatic transformation from a political ideology to an ordinary ethic that rests in relationships of affection between those who consider themselves as communists. In simple words, the effectiveness of communism in the *población* has been fundamentally based on its capacity to make sense of or incarnate in *pobladores*' everyday lives. Thus, the two ethnographic vignettes presented above – the discussion on Venezuela's situation and the Gonzalo-Carmen controversy – are only two of many examples in which the ethical form of communism is expressed daily among my communist friends. However, these stories could be also seen as examples of the practical and regular work of a typical structure of the Communist Party such as a local cell. In what follows I will argue that this correspondence between the Party´s modus operandi and *población´*s everyday life has determined both the success and the failure of the Communist Party in politically embracing *población* La Victoria through its history.

It is commonly accepted among researchers that the Chilean Communist Party has historically asserted different traditions and discourses that have been very often incredibly contradictory (Alvarez 2011, Corvalán M. 2000, Sabrovsky 1988). Thus, at different times, the Party has considered itself as the heir to the historical struggles of popular classes in Chile while promoting their work as founded on the scientific and objective rules of Marxism-Leninism; it has affirmed a nationalistic or patriotic discourse on several topics while advocating an internationalist approach defending the universality of the working class and soviet revolution; finally, the Party has supported the experiences of armed struggle in different countries, while in Chile – most of the time, except during the 1980s – it has followed a democratic-electoral and legalistic political praxis, becoming a traditional actor in the Chilean party system (Alvarez 2011). Similarly, communist discourses and strategies have not only been internally contradictory in each historical period since its foundation in 1912, but they have also radically changed through time (Corvalán M. 2000).[34] How can we explain that despite all these contradictions and changes the Party has been able to maintain its

[34] The Chilean Communist Party was founded originally in 1912 under a different name – POS, *Partido Obrero Socialista* (or Socialist Worker´s Party). In its third congress in 1922, this party affiliated to the Third International changing its name to Communist Party. Due to the evident continuity with the former party, most Chilean communists consider 1912 as the year of the Party´s foundation.

presence in the country for more than a century – even if nowadays, as with the rest of the parties, this presence appears more reduced than in the past? According to Alvarez, the answer should be found in the fact that 'the issue of the Party unity acted as the linchpin of communist political culture':

> Just like Marxism was a finished theory because it was the ultimate truth, the Party line, supposedly issued from the application of the Marxist theory to the Chilean reality, should not change either. For this reason, the possibilities of making a profound review to the Communist Party line not only implied a different point of view over the political moment – something that happened in other political parties – , but was an attack over one of the pillars of the communist creed: the Party finally was always right. (Alvarez 2011:40)

One of the most important leaders in the Party´s history, Luis Corvalán, stated this fundamental point in his own terms, 'I prefer to see the Party defeated than to see it divided' (quoted in Labarca 1972).[35] In other words, for the communists, 'the defence of the "monolithic" character of the Party made it preferable to be united in error than separated by the truth. This last component of the creed (…) was the base that supported all other components' (Alvarez 2011: 41). Therefore, no matter the contradictions in discourse or its changes through time, the most important condition of being a 'true' communist was – and currently is – the commitment to the Party´s unity.

It would be a mistake to suggest that this fundamental feature is exclusive to the Chilean Communist Party. In fact, this was the tone of most parties created around the world under Leninist principles and as images of the Soviet Communist Party (Alvarez 2011, Harnecker 1972, Kriegel 1978, Sabine 1973). Although the organic principle designed by Lenin in order to maintain Party unity was his famous 'democratic centralism', in the ordinary practice – especially among the non-directive sections of

[35] Luis Corvalán L. was the general secretary – main leader – of the Chilean Communist Party from 1958 to 1990. This long period could be explained under the same premise that I am trying to establish. Party leaders used to be replaced only when they resigned or died precisely because they incarnated a party that was never wrong.

the Party – this principle is accomplished in theory under two mechanisms: the unity of action and the Party´s discipline. The unity of action is basically the everyday confirmation that 'the whole organization is acting in the same direction, with the same purpose', while the discipline is the permanent and practical expression of the importance of 'conscious behaviour needed to defeat in the struggle' (Harnecker 1972: 14). The connection between both is clear: while the first performatively reaffirms the unity of the Party, the second monitors members' actions, preventing and amending those behaviours that deviate from the unity of action. Although Lenin, according to Barrington Moore, showed before the 1917 revolution a very pragmatic view over the organization of the Party – criticizing the excess of democracy in some situations and pushing in others for more democracy when Bolsheviks were not in control of the Party – the Party´s model created around those years of illegal political work was even deepened when the Party reached power. This model was a conspiratorial and highly centralized organization commanded by an intellectual elite in which the discipline and the unity of action – in conjunction with an extent of secrecy – were fundamental values and practices (Moore 1950).

As we can imagine, the stories presented here were taken, from several similar others, as exemplary experiences of these two features of the Party´s praxis. First, my friends' response regarding my doubts on Venezuela´s crisis was a clear demonstration of how the 'unity of action' is not only a theoretical concept but a lived experience among communists in La Victoria nowadays. Thus, when I confronted them with my perceptions on Telesur's news, they immediately reacted as if they were one voice, criticizing me for my doubts and defending Venezuela´s government. But more than to witness a happy coincidence in opinions or beliefs, I was witnessing a Party performance: each of them was expressing as a personal opinion something that had already been sanctioned as the Party´s opinion. This can explain the fact that all of them not only did not show any surprise in the others' views – as they were expecting a shared response – but also that they finally interpreted my doubts as normal, realizing that I was not a proper communist militant like them. After witnessing these kinds of acts many times during fieldwork, I came to learn that, while in some situations my friends used to react as a whole, in 'unity', in others they accepted differences and disagreements in opinion and action between them without much problem – sometimes

in political issues or regarding the Party itself as we will see later. Far from being contradictory, both scenarios rested on the same unitary principle: differences were just thematic areas left unsanctioned by the Party or, in other words, spaces that did not threaten the Party´s unity. At the same time, those situations in which the unity of action was performed were not expressed either as discontinuities or transgressions of their personal identities nor as simulations that hide another – more real – personal world. Rather, they were experienced as true expressions of their actual positions in life, as properly personal opinions and actions. In those moments, my communist friends did not pretend to act as if they were a whole, they actually were a whole.

Secondly, when the unity of action was not achieved or some member´s actions or opinions seemed to threaten Party unity, an informal discipline 'device' began its operation. This is what I inadvertently witnessed the week before that controversial meeting during which Carmen formally exposed her apprehensions on Gonzalo´s behaviour in front of the whole group. In fact, the moment when I was trying to remember that apparently insignificant former conversation between Carmen and Gonzalo was the exact moment during my fieldwork in which I realized that being a communist was primarily an ethical issue. Afterwards, I suddenly started to see how every little face-to-face interaction between my friends was devoted to influencing each other, in order to reach a common position regarding a wide range of topics – especially those that could be considered as personal or domestic, such as this case of a work-related issue, to correct deviant behaviour and, in short, to keep the Party´s unity. Thus, the controversial meeting itself was just the formalization of this everyday discipline which took place precisely because the informal interactions had lost their effectiveness. Carmen saw that after all her efforts Gonzalo had finally acted precisely against what she considered as the correct behaviour for a communist. And this needed to be known, discussed, sanctioned and – in her mind – discouraged by the Party. However, what finally happened was exactly the opposite. When the case was presented, the whole group progressively supported Gonzalo´s action, even those who had encouraged Carmen to formalize her complaint – something that was revealed to me some time after. Lastly, the situation was felt by Carmen as a betrayal and accordingly she left the cell.

At first glance, the centrality placed by the Party on the maintenance of its unity and its members' discipline – summarized and exemplified in these stories – seems to be enough to explain why being a communist was primarily experienced by my friends as an adaptation into an ordinary ethic: through everyday practice, the Party basically appears to control its members' opinions, decisions and actions in life. Taking this idea to the extreme, the relation between the Party as an institution beyond the *población*'s limits and the communist *pobladores* would be one of submission or domination, in which the terms of the ethic would be predetermined from outside the *población*, namely by some upper section of the Party. *Pobladores* would therefore lack autonomy or agency, becoming automatons without a will. Used more as a prejudice than an actual description, this idea of lack of autonomy has actually been externally – and pejoratively – attributed to the Chilean communist militants permanently throughout history (Alvarez 2011) and, in a completely different context, it was also endorsed to the Soviet citizens regarding the Soviet Communist Party during socialist times (Yurchak 2005). In Yurchak's account, the only imagined alternative to the narrative of the entire domination by the Party – which has also been used to explain the Soviet Union's collapse – is that of the cynical person, publicly devoted to the Party but with a private dissent or silent resistance, a notion similar to the 'hidden transcripts' proposed by Scott (1990). According to Yurchak, however, the binary narrative – summarized in the distinction domination/resistance – tends to obscure the fact that 'for a great number of Soviet citizens, many of the fundamental values, ideals and realities of Soviet life […] were of genuine importance' (2005: 8). Similarly, as I established before, when communist *pobladores* expressed their 'unity of action' and therefore their alignment with the Party, their performances were also genuine and not cynical. Is then the relation between the Party and the *pobladores* marked by total subordination, as has been derogatively attributed to them? Or perhaps to understand this connection, we should move beyond the domination/resistance dichotomy, as some ethnographic accounts in different contexts have suggested (Auyero 2000, Holbraad 2014, Mahmood 2005, Yurchak 2005)?

As I have already stated throughout this chapter, the communist ethic in the *población* has relied upon the relationships of affection that communists have built with other communists, friends and kin, dead and alive. Thus, the stories of Juan, Amanda, Gloria

Rodríguez and Manuel have shown how their decisions and actions in different moments of their lives were fundamentally influenced by those who were related to them in those moments and with whom they had drawn the moral distinctions that made them communists. The fact that two of them, Juan and Amanda, nowadays are not proper communist militants but still consider themselves as communists confirms this perception: being a communist in the *población* is based neither on the actual or effective membership in the Party nor in the personal adherence to a political programme or ideology, but fundamentally in the ordinary ties that bind people together within the *población*. In short, what constitutes a communist is basically what constitutes every person in the *población*. Looking through this prism, the ordinary and particular condition of the communist cell with which I was deeply involved during fieldwork becomes evident: they form a group like any other in the *población*, with strong bonds between them marked by affection and sharp separation and distance with other people and groups in the *población*, including other communists. In this sense, they not only cannot escape from the regime of the political economy of affection that underlines the *población*'s social life, but they are primarily constituted by this everyday dynamic.

In the Gonzalo-Carmen controversy, for example, it was this ordinary condition of the cell that determined the series of events that ended with Carmen leaving the cell. A couple of months after this meeting, Gonzalo came to my house in La Victoria and we started to talk about this situation. He was still confused about Carmen's attitude towards him. Particularly, he could not understand why she was so angry up to the point that she never spoke to him again. I felt the duty of telling him that Carmen had acted that way because she thought – according to some gossip – that he was lazy. Although he was in shock for some minutes, through this revelation he finally had an explanation of what had actually happened. Lastly, he bitterly complained about her because, according to him, 'she should have been more sincere from the beginning as the friend that she supposedly was'. However, I think that she acted in that way precisely because he was her friend. She did not want to hurt him by telling him what everyone was secretly saying about him and therefore she treated the problem with extreme caution. Unable to present this argument in front of the group, Carmen´s claim

became confusing and therefore no one was able to see Gonzalo´s action as a threat to the unity of the Party.

If we accept, according to my ethnographic descriptions, that communists are not different in their constitution from other groups in the *población* and, therefore, the fact that they build their ethical distinctions to conduct themselves through life according to their social relationships, then unity of action and discipline cannot be seen as exclusive features of the Party anymore, but as referring more generally to the modus operandi of every group in the *población*. Indeed, unity of action and discipline are formalized names that denote the ordinary effects of social relationships: through strong bonds derived from the scarcity of affection, *pobladores* exert everyday control over each other in their decisions, opinions and actions. In other words, due to their voluntary and purely affective character, social relationships are, by themselves, 'commitments of unity'. Thus, although the Communist Party is an organization created as a response to an entirely different historical, geographical and political context, its successful presence in La Victoria from the *toma* onwards has been related to an unsought coupling between its centralized and controlling character – more so than any other political organization – and the everyday dynamics that underlines the *población*'s social life. Contrarily to representing an intermediary between *pobladores* and the state – as political theory defines parties (Duverger 1954, Sartori 2005), the Communist Party in the *población* has historically been a strong space of sociability which has allowed some *pobladores* to draw the ethical distinctions they need to confront the uncertainties of everyday life.

This ethnographic definition of the Party poses a challenge not only to the political theory of parties, but also, and especially, to the definition of the Communist Party as a centralized and hierarchical national organization. Thus, if communist *pobladores* are constituted by and respond fundamentally to their social relationships in the *población*, what would their relation with the Party – understood as a vertical formal organization – be? Or, in other words, what definition of Party are they using when they honestly express through acts and opinions their total commitment to the Party´s unity? In his research on Cuban politics, Holbraad (2014) attempts to solve the paradox that he observes between Cubans' permanent expression of discontent and frustration

with the late revolutionary regime while, at the same time, they 'continue to support the Revolution, profess their pride for it, and wish to defend it' (Holbraad 2014: 369). According to Holbraad, this apparent contradiction can be solved if we note that, for Cubans, 'Revolution' has two different meanings: on one hand, it represents the causal object of what they consider a depressive and critical situation and, on the other, it implies the cosmological event that constitutes their whole world – a world without an outside and that therefore cannot be chosen as an alternative among others. Similarly, when communist *pobladores* refers to the 'Party' they mean two different things (often in a confused and barely noticeable way). First, they use the word 'Party' to speak about a bigger and national organization of which they are a little, powerless and subordinated part. Second, they normally also consider themselves as 'the Party', as if they represent the whole organization at once. This latter definition was literally expressed to me on several occasions (during informal conversations and meetings) by my communist friends, using these exact words: 'we are the Party'. While for Cubans the 'Revolution' as a cosmological event constitutes the limit of all criticisms, for communist *pobladores* all their differences and contradictions with the Party, and even their own awareness of subordination to it as a formal organization, are dissolved every day or suspended under their definition of themselves as 'the Party'. This implies that, ultimately, keeping the Party´s unity means for them to maintain their allegiance to the ethical distinctions produced and sustained by their social relationships. It was in its contradiction to this definition of the Party that Carmen saw Gonzalo's actions as a threat, and it was this same Party that had sanctioned that Venezuela´s situation was an attempt of coup d'état.

The relationship that communist *pobladores* have established with the Party as a formal and national organization can now be properly understood. Inasmuch as communist *pobladores* define themselves as the whole Party (configured in practice by their social relationships), no subordination is possible. In fact, a distinction such as domination/resistance is meaningless as they always emerge as the final court to sanction the actions and opinions that maintain or threaten the Party´s unity. From the point of view of the Party, although it has been historically successful in reproducing itself within the *población*, doing so has implied a political failure, as *pobladores* appear before it as incomprehensible and uncontrollable. Moreover, the Party cannot

increase through any kind of effort its political influence on the *población* because its existence there is based on the affective ties between some *pobladores* and the separation with others. This is the reason why, in my opinion, the Party could never explicitly count on *pobladores* as a political support group – they were even seen as a threat for a long time – and why the Party was only able to conceptualize them as 'young workers'. But, further, it was due to this immeasurability of the *pobladores*, that the Party was surprised in the 1980s when *pobladores* became the main actors in the fight against dictatorship. This profound disconnection between the Party as a formal institution and the Party as a group of *pobladores* does not imply that they do not have any kind of relation. In his ethnographic research in an Argentinian *villa* (in Chile, *población*), Auyero (2000) suggests that instead of the traditional conceptualization of a patron-client relationship between *pobladores* and politicians, we must consider that, from the point of view of *pobladores,* the tie created with a political leader is an actual friendship. I could also perceive such connections many times, although, unlike Auyero, I noticed that among communist *pobladores* in La Victoria the horizontal links were by far more decisive and important in everyday life than the vertical ones.

I would like to close this chapter with a final example regarding the disconnection between both parties. During my fieldwork, the parliamentary and presidential national elections took place. Sometime before the event, the Communist Party established an agreement to form a political coalition with the social democratic parties of *Concertación* (which ruled the country for 20 years from 1990). My friends were explicitly against such an agreement (calling it 'a new betrayal to the people'), but after it happened, they did not talk about this at political meetings anymore. In fact, the whole issue of the election simply disappeared, although it was impossible not to notice the countless posters and the political movement of the campaigns in the *población* and the country. Instead of deciding if they were for or against the Party's decision, they acted as if such a decision did not threaten the Party´s unity and did nothing about it. In practice, some cell members softly supported the campaign, while others simply obviated its existence. Similarly, on election day some of them voted according to the institutional Party instructions, others voted for other leftist candidates and my friend Ernesto fell asleep and did not vote. At the cell meeting after the

elections, everyone was talking about the results but there was no discussion about the different paths followed by members on that day or during the campaign.

# Chapter 4: Exerting control: living politics as sacrifice

## Days of war

In 1983 many civil society organizations and several political groups in the country had called for a new two-day national protest against Pinochet's dictatorship (1973-1990). As in the first of these national protests, *poblaciones* would once again be the central location for the expression of discontent and the focus of the struggle against the military rule in the country. In *población* La Victoria, two days before the protest, Gabriela and Isabel – as leaders of two local organizations – participated in a meeting with other leaders and delegates in order to prepare for the day of the protest and to distribute tasks and the areas of the *población* that each group had to protect. The night before the event, Ines, Vicente and a few other *pobladores* silently moved several truck tyres – taken from a car repair shop – around the *población* on a tumbril, leaving them in specific corners by the east side of La Victoria. These tyres would be used the next day for barricades. Emilio and Manuel, with several of their friends and Party members, spent all the previous day and night digging trenches to prevent the entry of military or police vehicles during the protests. Near dawn, Laura and her combat unit intercepted a public bus and, after asking the driver and the few passengers to get off, they burned it.[36] Likewise, many other *pobladores* carried out several tasks (from painting walls to organizing child care and cooking collective food) in order to prepare for a new protest day, one of twenty-one that took place throughout the 1980s.

The fray started timidly at midday, oriented towards police vehicles located immediately outside La Victoria. As it had been prepared, many plastic footballs were thrown into the main street (30 de Octubre) and everyone, including children, began an odd football match, confusing the police. In the afternoon, La Victoria´s main thoroughfare was filled with *pobladores*, especially young people, who attacked the police with rocks, while the police responded by shooting tear gas and pellets to disperse the masses. The air everywhere in La Victoria was unbreathable. Despite the barricades and trenches, at some point a group of anti-riot police was able to cross the

[36] *Unidades de Combate* (combat units) were military organizations formed by communist militants in different local territories (usually *poblaciones*) as part of the politics of armed confrontation developed by the Party during the years of struggle against the dictatorship in the 1980s.

limits of the *población,* approaching the protesters and initiating a cycle of advances and setbacks between the two sides. Immersed in the mass, Isabel shouted at other *pobladores* to keep up throwing stones and fire bombs, thus maintaining the distance with the police. After some time in this dynamic, Father Pierre Dubois, the main priest of La Victoria, appeared in the fray trying to calm down the protesters – to little effect. Then he turned to the police, approaching and asking them to withdraw from the *población*. As the police continued shouting, Father Pierre put himself in the middle – as a human shield – trying to stop them, while the protesters were anxiously waiting for Father Pierre to move away in order to restart the combat. At the same moment, at the Catholic church, Father André Jarlan and *pobladores* from the protest medical group were healing those many *pobladores* who were injured in the protest.

At night, the combat intensified and became more dangerous. Manuel and other *pobladores* threw some iron chains at the electricity cables and after the explosions La Victoria was submerged into the darkness – except for those barricades still burning. Some time later, the police entered completely into the *población,* dispersing the protesters throughout La Victoria. With this, the fight changed its format and it became a combat between smaller groups of *pobladores* and groups of anti-riot police. At this point, *pobladores* used the darkness, their knowledge of the *población* and the rooves of the houses to continue pressuring the police. Protesters – especially members from guerrillas and combat units, among them my friends Pedro and Laura – and anti-riot police were, by that time, using guns and shooting could be heard from everywhere in the *población*. At dawn, after the failed persecutions of *pobladores* and considering the difficult conditions for the operation, the police retired towards the limits of the *población*. Despite the countless people injured, a couple of arrests and perhaps one *poblador* killed, *pobladores* felt that they had won the battle and also retired to their houses. That night they were able to sleep in a free territory, a space not controlled by the military. Tomorrow would be another protest day and they should be prepared for the next round.

Figure 4-1: Mural of the 1980s protests (author's photo)

### The uprising of *pobladores*

This story portrays a typical day of protest against the dictatorship in La Victoria and other Chilean *poblaciones* during the 1980s. As such, it is not meant to be a factual reconstruction of any specific day but my own synthesis of several stories that I heard from my friends, my host family and neighbours during fieldwork. In fact, perhaps with the exception of the day on which Father André Jarlan was assassinated by the police – 4th of September 1984 – *pobladores* are currently unable to reproduce a detailed reconstruction of any specific day of protest.[37] Probably because of the time

[37] Father André Jarlan´s assassination was one of the most terrible events experienced in La Victoria during the 1980s. In a protest day, the police were following a group of journalists who escaped though one of the little streets of the *población*. Trying to stop them, the police shot at them, striking the priest house where Father André was reading the Bible. He died instantly in his room. When *pobladores* heard about the news, they spontaneously put candles throughout the *población* and gathered in front of the Catholic church with the intention of attacking the police. *Población* leaders and especially Father Pierre Dubois calmed the mass and a few days later, most *pobladores* walked from La Victoria to the city centre to assist Father André's funeral in Santiago's cathedral. The whole story was documented by journalist Patricia Verdugo in her book *André de la Victoria* (1984).

that has passed, the intensity of those days, their regularity and number, dates and actions have tended to mix and become confused in their minds. In my opinion, the confusion is also related to the fact that for many *pobladores* from La Victoria these events were not disconnected from the ordinary activities and situations that they experienced in their everyday lives in those years. Thus, in their stories, the 1980s seem to be a large and continuous national event in which they locate themselves as the main actors. But also, beyond *pobladores*, most of the literature over the period has conceptualized *poblaciones* such as La Victoria as the only spaces in the country in which the resistance and struggle over dictatorship was open and permanent.

Figure 4-2: House where André Jarlan was killed. Currently a National Monument (author's photo)

The *pobladores*' movement was considered an incredible and unexpected phenomenon, not only because of the commitment and bravery that they showed in a highly repressive context but also because they were – and still are – the poorest and most powerless people in the country (along with most Chilean peasants and rural Mapuche people). For this reason, scholars from different social disciplines conducted several studies in order to elaborate an explanation for the phenomenon, including its

scope and limitations. In general, all the scholars coalesced around two opposing theses. The first – typically supported by sociologists – considered mobilizations as an expression of anomie caused by the structural lack of integration of *pobladores* into the benefits of capitalist modernization. This exclusion was incremented due to the economic crisis in the 1980s produced by the military neoliberal transformation (Arriagada 1988, Campero 1987, Salman 1994, Tironi 1987, Valenzuela 1984). On the contrary, the second explanation – mostly supported by social historians – proposed that *pobladores*' riots were the last and contingent manifestation of the historical struggle of popular actors or the working class that had irrupted into the Chilean political arena at least since the beginning of the 20th century (Baño 2004, Garcés and de la Maza 1985, Oxhorn 1995, Posner 2008, Razeto 1987, Salazar 2006, Valdés 1986). Thus, while the first thesis stressed the decomposition of social ties, the second highlighted *pobladores*' solidarity (Espinoza 1993).

Confronting both theses, political scientist Schneider (1995) showed that not all *poblaciones* developed the same degree of combativeness – many did not participate in protest at all – and that although economic crisis had particularly impacted all Chilean poor sectors, those people who had felt a greater impact were not necessarily those who became more involved in the mobilizations. Thus, neither the economic crisis nor a transversal popular identity could be considered the immediate causes of the riots. Schneider also made an interesting discovery: those *poblaciones* in which mobilization was generalized and permanent – such as La Victoria – had in common a prominent presence of members of the Communist Party. According to her, these communist militants or activists were the ones who mobilized the *poblaciones* based on their 'historical work in popular culture' and their 'political skills'.

During my fieldwork, I established strong bonds with several of these communist militants up to the point that some of them came to be my family and my closest friends. I had countless conversations with them regarding their experiences during the 1980s and I conducted interviews with *pobladores* from other political and non-political groups who also lived through the dictatorship. Through their stories, I learnt what they were able to do for each other and what they believed, but also I realized some of their limits. As I have stated in Chapters 2 and 3, neither in the past nor today

would one group in the *población*, the communist militants in this case, be capable of directly mobilizing other groups and the whole *población*, not even in a scenario like that of the dictatorship. The *población*'s social life was and is currently composed of many formal and informal groups with different agendas and interests, groups characterized by strong bonds of affection between their members and definitive separations and distances – many times marked by dislike and resentment – regarding other groups. Therefore, if we accept Schneider's discovery regarding the importance of communist militants in *pobladores*' mobilizations, it seems that their 'work in popular culture' or their 'political skills' are unlikely descriptors of their actual incidence in the riots during the 1980s – 'work' and 'skills' that are also present in times with no mobilization, such as before and after the 1980s.

In this chapter, I do not pretend to produce a new historical reconstruction of the actual events experienced in *poblaciones* or the country during the dictatorship or to propose a new account of the objective causes of the 1980s riots. Certainly, it is undeniable that the economic crisis and the particular history of mobilized *poblaciones* are unavoidable conditions for understanding this phenomenon, although they say little regarding the specific experiences lived by *pobladores* during that time. Instead, I want to focus on the current perception of *pobladores* who belonged to the Communist Party and other political groups at that time – reflected also in Schneider's account – that they were the responsible actors for the generalized mobilization in La Victoria even though they were unable to reach other groups of the *población* that were located beyond their boundaries. In other words, I will try, through *pobladores'* experiences, to make sense of how a collective result such as the massive and permanent protests could be possible in a highly fragmented social milieu such as the *población*.

In what follows, I will argue that communist *pobladores* and in general those called *políticos* (*pobladores* who participated in political groups and/or were focused on national politics) were able to modify the limits of what they were willing to do in order to act according to their ethical principles and political objectives. Doing this, they were reproducing what I call 'a collective ethical displacement' – a coincidental change in ethical frames of different groups and people – regarding politics and political violence that happened in the *población* in those years, while at the same time

*políticos* became the main producers of such a displacement. Through many public performances highly visible to the rest of the *pobladores,* such as proclamations, food robbery, sabotage and armed confrontation with the police and the military, they showed themselves to the whole *población* risking their lives for what they believed in. Thus, in a probably more uncertain everyday life than nowadays, these *pobladores políticos* were able to demonstrate a radical and strong ethical framework for directing their lives – something that they referred to as 'taking control over their lives' – transforming politics into a highly attractive path to follow, especially for young people. However, as we know from *pobladores*' stories and historical accounts, what characterized *pobladores'* mobilizations and made them an important phenomenon was that almost everyone participated in the struggle – in different forms – including informal groups of friends and family, churches and even criminal groups. In my opinion, with their acts, *políticos* not only became more cohesive, stronger and expanded in numbers of people and groups, but also they indirectly changed the way that politics was perceived by the rest of the *pobladores*.

By that time, *políticos'* actions came to be seen primarily as non-economic sacrifice – as pure affection, pure solidarity. This sacrifice inevitably led to an alteration of affection ties between *pobladores* – ties that have a sacrificial character – and, consequently, to an alteration of the ethical frames of different groups and people to conduct them in life. Through this, *pobladores* from different groups participated simultaneously but also independently in the struggle, an act that assumed the category of virtue to many groups with different agendas and interests. Using *pobladores'* stories, in this chapter I will describe the processes lived during the 1980s in the *población*, while in Chapter 6 I will return to the problem of collective action, showing that what seems to have happened then is something still observable – on a lower scale – in the everyday lives of *pobladores*. First, however, I would like to discuss what is currently the most widespread explanation regarding *pobladores*' uprising, that is, the extreme repression experienced during the dictatorship.

**Repression, resistance and ethical displacement**

During the 1980s, La Victoria and other *poblaciones* obtained wide recognition for the organization, contentiousness and audacity deployed at the moments of direct

confrontation with the police and military forces, particularly on national protest days. However, between those days of especially violent struggle, *pobladores* developed a less well-known but extensive set of pacific and highly creative anti-regime activities to generate conscience among *pobladores* of the political situation, to support each other in moments of economic crisis and restricted freedoms and to express their personal and collective feelings in that context. Among many other activities, they organized an *olla común* (soup-kitchen), created an organization to buy groceries collectively (*comprando juntos*), distributed milk and other food for children, generated and circulated political and cultural propaganda, implemented cultural and social workshops, created a local protest medical group, organized collective celebrations (such as the anniversary of the *población*), painted the *población*'s walls, embroidered burlaps (an artistic and political expression), created new political and social organizations, etc. Although incomplete, this list reveals the massiveness, amplitude and creativity of the resistance movement in La Victoria, in which the direct protest was only a part of a more comprehensive and encompassing social process.

Certainly, political participation in the *población* achieved very high levels in those years, as the stories of *pobladores* from different organizations and even from those who did not participate in any formal organization, nowadays show. However, this participation should not be understood as if all *pobladores* participated the whole time in the same situations. On the contrary, most of the organizations developed their activities according to their own interests and agendas and their targets were their members, their families, their friends and a few others. Even in the case of the protest days, in which everyone participated together, the reasons and objectives for which *pobladores* found themselves in the struggle could vary enormously. For several of my communist friends, like Manuel, the cause was not only to defeat dictatorship but to move the country towards a revolutionary process. Pedro and his group had more practical objectives: they wanted to confront the dictatorship with guns and to kill some of the military. Other, such as the Catholics, could be found in the protest trying to defend the *población* – their community. For many unorganized *pobladores*, as some neighbours from my *cuadra* told me, the protests were just events to see and share with family and friends. A similar view is portrayed by Paley (2001) in a conversation with two *pobladoras* from *población* La Bandera, another Santiago

*población* in which the protests against the dictatorship were massive. Paley asks the women why they feel nostalgia for a time so violent and dangerous. The *pobladoras* respond that they liked to go to the protests because 'it was fun', that in the protests they met with their family and they could share something to drink with other neighbours (Paley 2001: 88-89). Even in these cases, *pobladores* usually considered – as my neighbours told me – that they were taking part in a political action that sought to confront the military. Thus, and contrary to some research that saw this lack of political-ideological consciousness – present in most *pobladores* – as a sign of anomie, I consider that politics in the *población* should be viewed beyond ideological/party lines and rather as a space in which people could manifest their own interests, differences and values through significantly local but different ways (Forbess and Michelutti 2013, Spencer 1997).

Therefore, although the high level of political participation deployed by *pobladores* in the protest and in their countless resistance activities could lead us to suggest the presence of a cohesive and structured movement, in fact the *pobladores* uprising was an incredibly heterogeneous phenomenon. Moreover, groups and unorganized *pobladores* not only disagreed with each other on many issues – orientation, objectives, actions, etc. – but they also strongly opposed each other. My friend Rosa, a former militant of MIR, told me that by the mid-1980s there was in her group an idea to form a front with other groups to oppose communists. They called this group 'TOCOCO', *todos contra los comunistas* (everyone against the communists). She said, 'It was a joke, a myth. We never aligned with each other for that. It was only that the communists were many and they had control over the *población*. This *población* has always been very communist'. This oppositional condition of groups and people – many times marked by a deep dislike and resentment – was presented even within the communists who formed several distinct groups of friends and family with different interests and objectives (see Chapter 3). In a certain way, *pobladores*' heterogeneity during the protests cycle was only the projection of a more permanent and everyday condition of *pobladores*, an inner fragmentation and division that can be found from the *toma* times up until today (see Chapter 2).[38] However, political struggle against the

[38] Contrary to what may be thought, open violence between politically opposed groups (and within these groups) was and is nowadays highly uncommon in La Victoria. I only heard a couple of stories of

dictatorship – to an extent that involved almost the whole *población* – is considered a matter of fact according to *pobladores* and research. What made, despite fragmentation and division, such a collective result possible?

In my conversations with *pobladores* from different groups and with unorganized *pobladores,* and even in the books that have recorded their memories, it is possible to find a common-sense interpretation, a shared discourse that rests at the base of every personal explanation regarding the massive scale of the protests during the 1980s in La Victoria – even in those who consider themselves as responsible for the phenomenon, such as the communist militants. According to *pobladores*, during the dictatorship their *población* became a target for the police and the military which exerted an indiscriminate and brutal repression over them. Then their struggle was, to a large extent, a response to the direct attack that they received. Beyond the violent clashes that occurred during the protest days, they vividly remember several moments in the 1970s and the 1980s in which the repression 'surpassed all limits'. For example, from time to time, police came to the *población* and violently raided one or several houses, looking for a specific person or for subversive elements (guns, pictures, propaganda, even books) that could suggest that the family or one of its members was involved in opposition groups. 'They destroyed everything', Sra. Margarita, an old communist *pobladora*, told me, '…threw the furniture and turned the beds over. We told them that we had not done anything, that we were not "extremist", but they did not listen. If we opposed them, they beat you up and arrested you'. According to Sra. Micha, when a house was being raided, 'all the neighbours started to whistle very loud,

specific assassinations occurring at the end of dictatorship as a product of political betrayals within groups (someone who had supposedly collaborated with the military). Outside political groups, although more common between individuals, collective violence has never been a feature of the *población* except among the drug gangs after dictatorship and the conflicts between *políticos* and drug gangs, especially during the 1990s. But even in the latter, the conflict was based more on verbal threats that in actual armed confrontation. Talking about drug gangs, my friend Isabel told me that the problem was impossible to solve because they were family and friends. Like her, I also consider that direct violence is usually prevented by the networks of family and friends that cross in different ways all *pobladores*. In general, direct violence between *pobladores* was described in very bad terms by my host family, my friends and neighbours. Thus, the strong and collective moral condemnation of '*domésticos*' (those *pobladores* who steal from other *pobladores*) can be seen as clear evidence in this sense.

calling others and some showed up yelling at the police to leave. It was terrible when this happened to you. I was raided four times'.

Another situation that everyone remembers, occurred two or maybe three times, when the military took all men from the *población* and conducted them to an open space outside (a football field). There, they were formed and left standing for hours, while some were interrogated. In the meantime, military raided the *población*, which had been left with only women and children. The most terrible thing of this practice for Don Pancho, one of my neighbours, was that 'we did not know what was happening with our families in the *población*. I also saw many old men that did not resist standing there in the heat. We tried to help them, but the military did not let us. Several just fainted after a while'. In total, throughout the dictatorship 14 *pobladores* from La Victoria were killed – including Father André Jarlan – to which number should be added an indeterminate number of army combatants from the *población* who died fighting dictatorship in other parts of the country. For some of my informants – and I heard this discourse many times coming from people from *políticos* to unorganized *pobladores* – these common experiences of repression not only conducted *pobladores* into the struggle but more importantly they allowed their unification around a common enemy, namely the military, personified in the figure of the dictator Pinochet.[39] This idea makes sense to *pobladores* as it allows them to explain today the political demobilization experienced in the *población* once the military rule came to its end in 1988/1990.

When one hears memories of the violence experienced by most *pobladores* during dictatorship, it is difficult not to agree with them that their mobilizations were either absolutely or largely a consequence of the military repression. However, as Thompson (1971) has convincingly shown, the transit between oppression and mass mobilization or resistance is not always an inevitable path. Thus, we must consider that throughout the 1970s and the first years of the 1980s, *pobladores* suffered several scenes of repression (for example, when all men were arrested) and there was not a collective response until the call for national protests in 1983. At the same time, repression could

[39] It is easy to link this common-enemy explanation of *pobladores* with the political discourse of parties and other opposition national groups during the years of struggle against the military.

be seen either as a cause or as an effect of resistance. In her research in Chilean *poblaciones* under dictatorship, Schneider (1995) showed that many *poblaciones* did not participate at all in the protest cycle and therefore that they did not experience violent repression such as the *pobladores* from La Victoria did. Moreover, Schneider also presented a case (*población* Granadilla) in which *pobladores* organized to improve their economic situation via falsely appearing in front of the authorities as if they were supporters of the military government. According to her, these *pobladores* realized that they gained more if they did not face the military directly and therefore they remained unnoticed for the repressive apparatus of the dictatorship, at least until the protests (Schneider 1995: 149).

Thus, although it is impossible to deny the effects of violent repression on *pobladores*' mobilization – primarily because this is a widespread and strong native explanation – it is also undeniable that between repression and resistance there must have been a collective ethical displacement (about what people were willing to do or thought they should do) projected into a decision made by *pobladores* at some point in order to respond to aggression with protest. But also, this movement implies – as the examples of other *poblaciones* suggest – that the relation between repression and resistance should not merely be understood as unidirectional: one leads to the other and vice-versa. Thus, as with the repression explanation, this ethical displacement is also traceable in *pobladores políticos'* stories and opinions, for example when they describe themselves as the agents responsible for the 1980s uprising as if their actions had gone far beyond a mere reaction to violence. At the same time, their stories refer to a combat situation in which they were not passive actors but a strong force capable of threatening and even defeating a highly trained police and military apparatus (see the opening vignette of this chapter). In the same sense, most *pobladores* who lived through the 1980s events suggest nowadays that what they did as a *población* was – directly or indirectly – the fundamental cause for the dictatorship's fall. How could they achieve such a big result if they were merely reacting to military violence and without an active position expressed nowadays in multiple scenes – vividly described by *pobladores* – of commitment, audacity, conviction and high risk? Thus, although experiencing an oppressive context, in *pobladores*' stories they do not appear as opposing the regime through passive everyday actions of resistance, like those described by Scott (1985)

for example, but through a direct and organized – though heterogeneous – confrontation, a voluntary and active contentious movement. This use of the concept of resistance corresponds then to the more bounded, transformative and on-the-ground use of it that some anthropologists, such as Ortner (1995) and Brown (1996), want to rescue from its all-embracing use.

With repression and political violence as a basis of collective experience, *pobladores* from different groups and even unorganized ones were then able to modify or displace their highly diverse ethical frames – while keeping their boundaries – thereby producing a common distinction, a generalized idea of virtue regarding mobilization and political protest. Such a collective ethical displacement allows us to understand why criminals, Catholics, Evangelicals, communists and even those who were interested in having a 'fun time' could converge in contentious activities and massive protests. However, this ethical change should not be seen as an instantaneous, linear and non-controversial process. As Feldman has noticed, political agency 'is not given but achieved on the basis of practices that alter the subject. Political agency is relational – it has no fixed ground – it is the effect of situated practices' (Feldman 1991: 1). In other words, according to Feldman, it is in the process of doing, a process that modifies a heterogeneous subject, that agency may be achieved.

In La Victoria, the ethical displacement that implicated *pobladores*' agency was an on-going consequence of the everyday relations between persons and groups altered by the actions and activities performed by them in the dictatorial context. One of these groups seems to have been of capital importance in this process, up to the point that *poblaciones* in which they were not present did not have massive protests. This group or groups were those formed by communist militants and activists (Schneider 1995). However, instead of focusing, as Schneider does, on their ordinary political abilities or on their regular activities in the *población* (those elements present before and after mobilizations), I think we should concentrate on the innovative elements that they developed during those years (those not present before or after the protest cycle). In particular, I am referring to the political use of guns in the armed confrontation against the military.

In what follows I will show how, through highly risky and visible armed actions, communists, other political groups and some unorganized *pobladores* emerged not only as reproducing the overall ethical displacement of the *población* in its more extreme form – putting their lives at risk, the limit of that virtue – but also, due to these actions, as producing such a displacement. According to my communist friends, since they embraced the armed struggle and performed increasingly violent actions against the regime, they started to feel that, for the first time, they were acting according to what they believed in, according to their own principles – as if they had taken 'control over their lives', as Laura once told me. Although different groups and people in the *población* assumed different positions regarding armed groups – from disagreeing with their methods to attraction and admiration – especially among the young people, their actions were seen in general as a genuine, convinced and disinterested response to the context, as a proper sacrifice for the good of the *población*. Perhaps this is the reason why *pobladores* did not see armed actions as the cause of the repression – as it may have been – but as an adequate or inadequate response to it – but always as a response. In my opinion, it is in the relation between these armed political groups and the rest of the *pobladores* that we could shed light on the conditions that led to the 1980s' mobilization and how most *pobladores* ended up fighting *políticos'* fight and considering *políticos'* enemy as their enemy. In the next section, I will focus in what is commonly considered to be the starting point for such a process, the politics of Mass Popular Rebellion promoted by the Communist Party.

**The politics of Mass Popular Rebellion**

The 3rd of September 1980. Luis Corvalán, General Secretary of the Chilean Communist Party, gave a famous speech from exile in Moscow in which he communicated the Party's adoption of a new political strategy to confront the dictatorship. This strategy was called *Política de Rebelión Popular de Masas* or Mass Popular Rebellion Politics (MPRP). Basically, this politics meant the acceptance and support from the Party of any form of struggle, including the use of violence in all its forms (even extreme violence), in order to finally put the dictatorship to an end (Corvalán 1997). Although the MPRP directly involved communist militants, the call was addressed to all opposition groups, all parties and all sectors of Chilean society.

In this way, due to the situation of extreme repression (with many Chilean communists in foreign countries and hundreds of militants killed), the Chilean Communist Party for the first time in its history left its traditional democratic and pacific orientation to relocate itself outside of state structures, embracing direct violence against the dictatorship (Rojas 2013).

The adoption of this new politics was not a decision taken overnight. Since the day of the coup d'état in 1973, some militants had started to talk about the impossibility of operating within a dictatorship through the normal political logic that they were used to. Therefore, by the time the decision was made, a group of communist militants had already received military training in Cuba and some had also participated in the liberation wars in Nicaragua and El Salvador. However, at the same time, other militants were reluctant regarding the new politics, militants who, based on the traditionally democratic proceedings of the Party, never felt confident with this new path (Bravo 2010, Corvalán 1997). Despite these internal tensions, around the time of the first national protest (11th of May 1983) the Party had already organized a structure in order to implement the MPRP. This politics produced three new military structures in the Party: 1. Mass military work, which was shaped by territorial organizations called Combat Units – parallel to the classical party structure based on cells – that aimed to locally confront armed forces with military actions of sabotage and direct clashes; 2. Work towards the armed forces, which aimed to penetrate the armed forces in order to produce an internal break among its members and to gain military support in the struggle against dictatorship; 3. The Party's own military forces, the Communist Party guerrilla which was called *Frente Patriotico Manuel Rodríguez* or *FPMR* (Rojas 2013). Several of my friends in the *población* participated in the local Combat Units but only a few were properly part of FPMR.

Although, originally, the MPRP had as its target all Chilean sectors and groups, the military politics that it implied became particularly relevant in *poblaciones* and in some more so than others. Probably one of the reasons behind this was that as parties were forbidden and militants were persecuted by the military, political activity had to turn towards the communitarian space and to anchor more clearly in bonds of family, friends and neighbours (Bravo 2010). But also, as communist militants from La

Victoria told me, the MPRP was a political turn for which they had been waiting a long time. According to my friend Emilio:

> The MPRP was the beginning of everything because it gave us a free pass to do what we wanted to do. Before that, the Party did not see military actions with good eyes. But here in the *población* some of us were clear that the dictatorship should be confronted directly with guns.

For Laura, 'the MPRP was important for us in confirming that we were right in what we were already doing'. Thus, all my communist friends agreed that MPRP was fundamental for them, not because it changed the way they were thinking or the kind of path that they considered necessary to follow, but in stopping the discussion and getting directly into action. In other words, the germ of the ethical displacement regarding what they were willing to do to confront dictatorship had operated before the MPRP among communist *pobladores* – and, according to Bravo (2010), in other sectors of the militancy.

Around 1980, a new generation of *pobladores políticos,* and among them communist militants, were coming of age in La Victoria. They had grown up hearing the epic story of how their parents, relatives and the rest of the older generation of *pobladores* had taken the land and formed the *población*. The Cuban Revolution and other revolutionary processes in the region had been common topics for conversations in their houses and were discussed daily with their friends. Che Guevara, Fidel Castro and Sandino among others, were the men they admired, their big heroes of childhood and youth. Moreover, many had valuable memories of Salvador Allende´s revolutionary Chile – they still remember vividly when Allende visited the *población* during his presidential campaign in 1970 – and the devastation and terror in the *población* and the country caused by the 1973 coup d'état.[40] And, they had lived a big and important part of their lives in dictatorship. This gap between an image of how a communist should behave in life – produced and shared in relations of family and

[40] I could see posters and pictures of Allende and/or Che Guevara – alongside those of family members – in all the houses of my communist friends that I visited during fieldwork. Regarding the terror, the rumour that the *población* would be bombed by the military circulated for some days in La Victoria immediately after the coup d'état. Han (2012) found the same rumour in *población* La Pincoya where she conducted her fieldwork.

friends – and the non-existent space left by the military to carry out that image in any form, was a fertile ground for the emergence of the armed innovation. For communists then, dictatorship was seen as a situation that disrupted their ability to dwell in their world (Zigon 2014). Although this gap could be thought of as extensible to all *pobladores políticos*, those who developed such a response were especially members of the younger generation, perhaps because they were living at that moment through the existential dilemma of having to decide a more general path for their lives or because they did not experience as adults the terrible defeat that the coup d'état had implied for communists. According to Isabel, a communist combatant from the 1980s, 'We wanted to be like the old ones [the old communist], they were our role models. But we also knew that that time [the 1980s] was different and that it was our time to fight'.

The armed path followed by many communists and *políticos* during those years was at least as related to their specific life trajectories as to a more general disposition regarding politics and political violence that the rest of the *pobladores* were developing during the 1980s. As we will see in the next section, most of the *pobladores* did not see armed actions as a threat to the community or their values but as an extreme and more or less adequate response to the totally abnormal situation of the dictatorship. Perhaps, as Spencer has noted for a totally different situation and context, collective violence emerges precisely in abnormal conditions and must be understood as an everyday result of those conditions (1990). During my fieldwork, many *pobladores* told me that they never rejected army combatants; on the contrary, they were protected by the community and were considered as a line of defence. This is the reason why, according to Bravo (2010), combatants from different *poblaciones* did not suffer so many casualties as could have occurred considering their radical position against a military regime that wanted to eliminate any inkling of opposition. In this sense, I affirm that although it was an innovation – i.e. not present in the older generation of *políticos* – their military politics was an extreme reproduction of a more general ethical displacement experienced by most pobladores, a change in which armed combatants were at the same time a consequence and a trigger.

**The guns of the weak**

Up to this point my overall argument could be summarized as follow. First, the two common explanations about the *pobladores*' uprising during the 1980s – in short, anomie and solidarity – could be understood as important conditions presented in highly mobilized *poblaciones* and in popular sectors more generally, but they say little about the particular experiences lived by *pobladores* from La Victoria at that time as they are remembered nowadays.[41] Second, during my fieldwork – as can be also found in memory books – most *pobladores* suggested that their fight was a consequence of the extreme repression exerted by the military. Although it is impossible to deny such a native explanation, I have shown that the transit between repression and resistance is not simple and linear. Thus, while *pobladores* remembered scenes of extreme repression during the 1970s, for example, a resistance response appeared properly only in the 1980s when there was a change in their general disposition toward violence and political fight. I have called this collective change an 'ethical displacement' as it did not modify the highly fragmented social milieu which was characteristic of the *población*.

Third, I have turned to Schneider's thesis regarding the fact that the mobilized *poblaciones* were those in which the Communist Party had an important presence of militants. This idea has an ethnographic basis, as communists from La Victoria – and other *políticos* – told me many times that through their actions they consider themselves responsible for the 1980s mobilizations. However, it is difficult to believe that they were simply able to reach other groups and people – totally diverse and often opposed to communists – via leadership skills and work in popular culture, as Schneider argues. My communist friends are also aware of this impossibility, as several of them struggle nowadays and since the 1990s to produce collective mobilization with completely different results from those they achieved in the 1980s (about their current political work see Chapter 5 and 6). Then, they have to logically assume the generalized 'repression-of-dictatorship explanation', which in my opinion weakens and even makes contradictory their agential discourse and experience.

[41] In fact, both conditions represent the two faces of the *población* visible even today as I have shown in chapter 2.

Finally, I have rescued communist and *políticos'* perception regarding their transcendental role in the protest cycle by highlighting the innovative element that they developed during those years, namely the politics of armed struggle. My argument is that, like other *pobladores*, *políticos* reproduced the ethical displacement which was occurring in the *población* in the 1980s but, at the same time, they were the main producers of such a displacement through highly visible armed actions that were progressively altering the ethical positions regarding political violence of other groups and people in the *población*. In this section, I will describe this process based on stories about armed struggle and the perception of *pobladores* about armed groups. My objective is to show that these actions expressed some important values for *pobladores*, such as audacity, courage, commitment and conviction, revealing to them a sacrificial dimension of politics. Thus, a new concept of virtue travelled between persons and groups, thereby politically mobilizing the whole *población*.

Throughout the 1980s and even before, in parallel and under the surface of political activities and social organizations of the *población*, *pobladores* from guerrilla groups (FPMR and MIR), Communist Party Combat Units and other informal groups developed a series of armed actions that sought to confront the regime and to impact on the rest of the *pobladores* and public opinion. Evidently, at the beginning, their actions were timid and the resources in terms of people and weapons were limited. Manuel, an 80's combatant, told me that in his first actions of sabotage with his friends of MIR they had few guns and most did not work. However, with the passing of the 1980s, the number of people involved in these actions grew, they received guns and basic military training from more prepared guerrilla combatants and their acts became more dangerous and reckless. Three kinds of actions had a huge impact in the *población* and are vividly remembered by *pobladores* nowadays: food truck robberies (called 'recoveries'), proclamations and actions of sabotage and direct confrontation with the police and the military.

Food truck robberies must be one of the most remembered events for *pobladores* because it was connected to a fundamental necessity barely fulfilled in a context of economic scarcity. In my very first conversation with my friend Jorge (36), who is not and was not related to any political group, he remembered:

> I was a child when, from here [his house], I could see people running towards 30 de Octubre [La Victoria's main street] and a crowd was there because the *Frente* [FPMR] had brought a truck and were handing out chicken meat to the people... In the afternoon, I was at school and they sent me back home because the *población* would be raided because of the stolen truck.


Figure 4-3: Mural of a food truck recovery in 1986 (author's photo)

Sra. Claudia (60), one of my neighbours, told me, 'When people from the *Frente* and other groups brought a truck, everyone found out immediately and we took some pots and went to where they were. It was chaos because they had to distribute everything very quickly before the *pacos* [the police] came out'. In the middle of that chaos, some of the combatants who had participated in the action would make a speech – with guns in their hands and covered with balaclavas – to *pobladores* explaining to them that their condition was a result of the dictatorship, while encouraging them to continue in the fight. Once I asked Amanda why in people´s stories this food was always meat. She answered, 'At that time meat was very expensive, not like now that everyone can

buy chicken for example. So, it was wonderful for everyone when they appeared with the trucks'. Talking to some of my communist friends who participated in these actions, they said that their actions were honestly directed to help people and to bring them some hope. But also, as we can imagine, food distribution had an important effect in terms of the image and opinions that people developed regarding armed groups and actions. Nowadays, the stories associated to the distribution of free food by armed groups have come to be considered a collective heritage in the *población* – along with protest days – as they can be explicitly seen in several painted walls (murals) in the *población*.

Another very characteristic public performance of armed groups in the *población* were the *proclamas* (proclamations). During the 1980s, from time to time different armed groups marched through the *población* shouting slogans, with their faces covered with balaclavas and carrying machine guns and pistols, finally stopping at a corner and making a speech calling openly to the people to keep fighting against the dictatorship – as in the actions of food distribution. They always finished their speech shooting their guns into the air, showing people that they were armed and active. Although with less impact than truck robberies, most of the people, Sra. Micha told me, used to clap at these public acts and, in general, helped the combatants in everything possible (for example, when they were shooting or escaping from the police or the military). Armed groups used to also be present in important public activities such as the anniversary of the *población*, which was maintained with many difficulties – because of restricted freedoms – during the dictatorship. As Gloria Rodríguez describes:

> After the years 84-85, military groups started to emerge… and the people received them very willingly. The first time that Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez appeared… the Frente went up on the stage, and I was conducting [the show] with other people, and I had just got off the stage to see the [anniversary] queen candidates when the shooting started. And I thought 'the cops are here', but no, it was the Frente that had gone up on stage to deliver their greetings. And I have the image of me going back on stage and seeing all the people running away to their houses. And I take up the microphone and say 'neighbours don't be afraid, this is a salutation

> from Frente Patriótico Manuel Rodríguez.' And I remember how people came back clapping, because they were never rejected. On the contrary, because people understood that they were like our defence, that they were coming to help us resist this process that for us was terribly dangerous because there were raids on us all the time… I'll tell you that in the following anniversaries we lead the queen candidates out guarded by the militias with their scarves and everything. (GTLV 2007: 145)

The final kind of events were sabotage actions, such as burning buses and other targets, printing and distribution of propaganda inside and outside the *población*, other recovery actions for financial purposes and direct armed confrontation with the police and the military. As in the introductory vignette, some of these clashes occurred on protest days, especially at night, but they could also happen during daylight. For example, my friend Pedro – who by that time was participating in a Combat Unit in the *población* – told me that one morning he and one of his friends spent a couple of hours shooting toward a police unit from a hidden position in a corner of the *población*. As the police officials could not see them, the officers started to shoot randomly out while Pedro could hit several of them. After a long time of shooting from both sides, a military *tanqueta* (small tank) appeared with several military in order to rescue the injured police officials and to control the situation. When the military started to move towards Pedro´s position, he and his friend just ran into the interior of the *población* towards a security house. Pedro never knew if the officials had died but he thinks that at least one should have perished.

These kinds of armed actions and confrontations were becoming more and more common as the 1980s passed, while military repression over the *población* was also increasing. Instead of considering repression as a consequence of armed actions, most people saw these armed groups as the more audacious and committed to the defence of the *población*, as Gloria Rodríguez said. Thus, in a cyclical process, more repression due to armed confrontation served to legitimize and give meaning to – in *pobladores*' minds – new armed and resistance actions. Moreover, most of these actions were, as we could see in their descriptions, highly visible performances: armed groups wanted to be seen by the people in order to gain their sympathy (for example through food

distribution) and to demonstrate their power (through their courage and their guns in proclamations and confrontations). Armed groups were therefore very careful in selecting their actions – in terms of form and content – and these actions always focused on attacking the dictatorship and were never against the population or other armed or opposition groups. In my opinion, with the exception of national guerrillas, especially FPMR, in their assassinations or attempted assassinations of military leaders, armed groups were never a real threat for the military regime but were nevertheless very effective in altering people's moral limits regarding what everyone was willing to accept about the political situation and what they were willing to do about it. And this effectiveness was even stronger in *poblaciones* such as La Victoria, where these performances became a part of everyday life. Thus, in all the interviews and most of the informal conversations that I conducted during fieldwork, I found a generally positive perception regarding armed groups in the 1980s, despite the fact that important leaders and groups of the *población* at that time were opposed to them (for example, the priests, the Catholics and even some communist groups). However, their opposition was only about the form and never about the content as these leaders and group were also part of the general struggle against the dictatorship.

This generalized positive attitude towards armed groups appears not only in current opinions but can also be exemplified with a story that Manuel once told me. At a meeting, his group had decided to perform a food *recuperación* (recovery). They were going to steal a truck of chicken, but as *poblaciones* such as La Victoria used to receive most of the food that armed groups recovered and as there were other hungry and poor people in the city, they decided to distribute the loot in another *población*. So, after the robbery they drove the truck towards a different *población* in the same district where La Victoria is located. They entered announcing that they were bringing food for the people. Surprisingly, no one came out. They summoned the people very loudly, but the streets were completely empty, and even the shops were closed. Finally, as they needed to be fast to avoid the police, they stopped at a closed shop and called for the owner to open the store to receive the groceries (almost all of the shops in *poblaciones* are extensions of the houses the owners live in). But, as they could see the owner hidden behind the window of the house, it was clear to them that she was not coming out. So, because they needed to justify the risk that they had taken and the whole

operation, they decided to offload the truck and throw the chickens over the store's gate. Manuel said:

> It was a ridiculous situation. We had put our heads at risk for people who did not want our help. Or maybe they were so afraid because of the political situation that they were afraid of us as well. Something like this was impossible in La Victoria. When a stolen truck appeared in the *población*, people became crazy to receive the food and to distribute it quickly between friends and family.

As the phenomenon of armed struggle became a part of the daily life of *pobladores* during the 1980s, its material expression, namely the guns, came to be seen as accepted and necessary objects. Although not totally alien to the *población*, guns were always controversial objects as they were used by criminal groups for their business or kept in homes for private protection. However, during the dictatorship, while for the military guns marked those who were 'extremist' or 'subversive groups', in the *población* they became the public expression of political dissidence.

This change in status can be exemplified by one of the stories that Amanda – a school teacher who is against any form of violence – remembers most vividly in her life and that happened in the last years of dictatorship. One of her friends was being persecuted by the military and he arrived at Amanda's parents' house one Saturday evening to ask her to keep a small arsenal that he normally hid at his own house. She agreed and they put the guns in a box in the backyard. The next day, a neighbour told Amanda that the militaries were raiding the *población,* looking for guns and people involved in subversive acts. As she happened to have the guns in her house, she became very nervous about the situation and together with Manuel they started to think how to figure out the problem. Finally, they realized that the only solution was to move the guns to a safer place outside the *población* or to a house in the *población* that had already been raided. Thus, they put all the guns in the lower part of the pram (their daughter Carolina was still a baby) taking care to cover everything with baby clothes; then they sat baby Carolina in the pram chair and they got dressed in their best clothes. The idea was to simulate a normal Sunday family walk. They left the house in apparent tranquillity (obviously Amanda was extremely nervous) walking slowly to a house

where they knew they could leave the guns. When they passed the military, they saw the family walking and one of them approached and ordered them back to their house. Amanda replied that they did not know that there would be a raid and that they were walking to church. But, as the military were focused on the houses, and the family looked very normal, they did not concentrate so much on them and Amanda, Manuel, baby Carolina and a pram full of guns were able to pass very easily through. Later they left the guns in the other house and went back to their own. Besides showing the common acceptance in the 1980s of guns as part of everyday life in the *población*, this story entails a fundamental point as well: even when guns were accepted, they always implied danger – an inevitable risk to those in contact with them.

This riskiness dissuaded most of the people from participating directly in armed actions who, likewise, came to be part of the many other activities and groups which comprised the fight against the dictatorship. However, for some *pobladores*, this extreme risk – and the values associated to it – was a source of attraction towards the armed path. This was the case of many young combatants of the 1980s, several of whom were without a previous political interest or family links to political groups. Pedro's life history is a good example of this. Like many other *pobladores* from La Victoria, Pedro witnessed the repression of the 1970s (after the coup d'état) with an increasing hatred because of the violence but, at the same time, without an active engagement in these events. Pedro did not relate to any organization in the *población* and was mostly interested in parties, drugs, alcohol and women (like most of the current young *pobladores*). Likewise, he left school at an early age and promptly started to work to earn money for his family and to pay for his own activities.

However, everything changed for Pedro in the early 1980s, when armed groups appeared in the *población*. At that moment, he realized that he wanted to be one of them: 'I wanted to kill some militaries, use guns and do to them what they were doing to us'. Suddenly, he became actively aware of the political situation and interested in participating in politics. Thus, he began to get involved with the Communist Party through a friend who invited him to some meetings. But Pedro did not feel completely comfortable in these meetings: 'They discussed and talked a lot, but I have always

been more of a person of action. So, my friend talked with them in order to incorporate me into a Combat Unit here in the *población*'. In the Combat Unit, Pedro showed that he was not afraid of anything and was capable of the most daring actions, especially direct armed confrontation. After a while, his availability and commitment to the fight made him a good prospect for the FPMR guerrilla, which he was invited to join afterwards. He said, 'But some people were against me entering the *Frente*. They thought that I was not reliable, because I am a crazy person. I have always been a crazy person, but a good militant as well'. These initial oppositions did not prevent him from finally becoming part of the FPMR, participating and even being in charge of important armed actions in Santiago and the south of Chile. For him and many armed combatants of the 1980s, becoming clandestine and entering a national guerrilla was the summit or the final recognition of the commitment and courage that a person could demonstrate. Nowadays, Pedro is deeply proud of everything that he did in the *población* and the FPMR as we can see in his words: 'In the south I was in charge of a unit of the *Frente*. Could you imagine? I was in charge of a group of university students and I only studied until fourth grade!'

In 1988, due to internal and external opposition, the military decided to hold a national plebiscite to determine if they would stay in power for ten years more. Most of the political organizations in the *población* participated in the campaign although, as many people told me, everyone thought that the military would commit electoral fraud. On the day of the plebiscite, most *pobladores* were ready to protest once the results were known and armed groups were prepared to attack the military more strongly than ever. Unexpectedly, the government appeared on television acknowledging their defeat, which implied, after a transition period of two years, the return to democracy. *Pobladores* celebrated the results that night as their final victory over dictatorship. Although political repression was maintained for several years in the *población*, as my communist friends remember, immediately after the plebiscite the collective fight was abandoned and organizations were left empty. In that moment, *políticos* lost their effectiveness in altering the ethical frames of other groups and people in the *población* and from then on politics would be associated, in *pobladores'* minds, with elections. While some armed groups (especially guerrillas) maintained their actions, these became meaningless as they were totally attached to the existence of dictatorship.

Thus, the kind of politics that had enabled *pobladores*' uprising simply disappeared overnight.

**Politics as sacrifice**

After hearing many stories during fieldwork about the struggle against the dictatorship, I came to realize that those stories related to political repression and violence, and to guns and armed groups had a higher status and gave the speaker – especially if personally involved in the story – a higher legitimacy to talk. Instead of focusing on the contextual and typical explanations regarding *pobladores*' uprising, this fact oriented my thoughts towards the relation between the massive resistance movement in the *población* and the role played by *políticos*, especially regarding the innovation of armed struggle. Although this innovation, as we saw before, had a national expression (mainly through guerrillas) and corresponded with a general politics of Mass Popular Rebellion developed by the Communist Party and other national political groups, in La Victoria the phenomenon of armed struggle emerged from *pobladores* themselves, originating in their personal and collective experiences and their links with family and friends. Pedro, Laura, Isabel, Manuel and many other combatants of the 1980s were *pobladores* who became *políticos* and some participated in armed groups primarily because of their affective relationships within the *población*.

As *pobladores*, *políticos* and armed groups formed one of the actors of a resistance movement that involved many different groups and people in extremely diverse and creative actions and activities. As I noted before, in a highly fragmented social milieu such as the *población* this collective movement could only be possible due to a generalized ethical displacement, a collective and active change in *pobladores'* position regarding political action and violence. Up to this point, my argument has been that *políticos* reproduced such a displacement in the form of armed struggle, much as the other *pobladores* did in different political forms, while, at the same time, that they became, through these actions, the main producers of it. With this I return to *políticos´* own perception, among them my communist friends, that they were responsible for the 1980s riots. How could they produce such an ethical displacement, modifying the ethical frames of other groups beyond their boundaries? What kind of politics is behind their actions and especially, behind armed struggle?

In the highly restricted context of the dictatorship, armed groups were viewed by the whole *población* as starring in bold aid actions and reckless demonstrations of armed power. In an incremental process of actions over actions, they were able to prove to themselves and to other *pobladores* that they were audacious, convinced, committed and basically that they were capable of doing whatever was necessary for what they believed in. Nowadays, they refer explicitly to these years as a time in which they gained 'control over their lives', that is, the only time in their lives when they felt that their ethical-political distinctions were implemented through effective actions (a control that they believe they lost after 1990. See Chapter 5). In an always uncertain everyday life – probably even more so in those years – *políticos* proved through their armed performances that they had a strong ethical framework to conduct them through life, which even attracted some young, previously unrelated, *pobladores* to participate in political groups (as in the case of Pedro and others). Although acts of courage and conviction as manifestations of ethical control are, by themselves, highly valued even today in the *población*, I think they are not enough to modify other people's positions and actions because, in order to do so, they need to appeal to a collective and permanent experience. In other words, a single demonstration of ethical control could be understood as such by a group and not necessary – and permanently – by others (this is what happens to the active political groups nowadays in the *población.* See Chapter 6).

In my opinion, what gave *políticos'* actions such a wide scope was that their actions were understood for themselves and other *pobladores* as sacrifice. When armed groups were seen distributing food, walking in the *población* with guns or in armed confrontation with the police or the military, they were sacrificing themselves, doing something voluntarily and beyond what is expected, without asking for something in return. In fact, any kind of political fight – but especially armed actions – was considered a sacrificial act in those years. This is the reason why most *pobladores* agreed and sympathized with the armed groups and why important leaders who were against violence, like the priests, were unable to effectively oppose them. During the 1980s, armed groups came to be the limit of any sacrifice, a pure act of affection

summarized in the gift of their lives for the sake of the *población*.[42] Thus, both sacrificial intention and community recognition were fulfilled (Weiss 2014).

Currently, all the stories regarding the 1980s struggles contain the same rhetoric of personal and collective sacrifice. This allows us to understand why the military repression has become the main explanation of the 1980s riots in the *población*. Basically, without the dictatorship and its repression as a basis, it is impossible to think of political actions as sacrificial acts. In the words of a *poblador* not related to political groups:

> We suffered very much with everything that happened during the dictatorship, with the cops that came shooting, that went into people's houses, that broke everything inside them, so people suffered and one suffered for those people too, because they were fighting for us. I believe that, that those people fought for us and that they were abused and hurt (for that reason), and that they were taken away, some of them came back, but others did not. (GIMP 2006: 56)

According to my communist friends, the use of guns marked out those who were really committed to the struggle, not so much in the sense of being more empowered by them but in the sense that those using guns put themselves at greater risk and therefore were willing to sacrifice more. Embracing the armed path implied for them an acceptance of the genuine possibility of being killed, but perhaps more important, a renunciation over the normal conditions of everyday life. This could happen with incarceration and torture (this was the case for Laura and Sra. Micha for example), through being estranged from your family and friends for political duties (the case of everyone) and, after a certain point, becoming clandestine (Pedro and Manuel). When I arrived in the *población,* I realized immediately that many *políticos* from the 1980s were in a sort of permanent competition for picturing themselves as those who were really involved in risky actions and therefore as those who sacrificed more over those years. However, others such as Pedro and Manuel talked less about themselves in those years because, according to them, those who talk more today are those who did less, that is, those who

[42] There was no more harmful and terrible gossip for these groups in the 1980s than that which claimed that they were keeping for themselves money sent from abroad to help the *población*.

sacrificed less – I had to become a friend to be able to penetrate into their life stories. In a certain way, talking about sacrifice leads to a sort of victimization that destroys the very notion of sacrifice, as it needs to be voluntary and without expecting something in return. Thus, a real sacrifice must remain untold to be considered as such (Mayblin 2014).

A parallel case was experienced by Laura regarding the policies of reparation implemented by the democratic governments after 1990 for human rights victims during dictatorship. These policies were established to repair to those who suffered political violence, giving them economic compensation, scholarships and other benefits (Montenegro and Piper 2009). For Laura, who was imprisoned and tortured in the last years of dictatorship, going to the Commission and telling them her testimony in order to receive the benefits implied a recognition of herself as a victim and not as a combatant who voluntarily fought to defeat the dictatorship.[43] But also, and perhaps more importantly, this implied an acceptance that everything that she did would be finally recognized and economically compensated, thereby destroying its sacrificial character. Although the situation was incredibly difficult for her, she finally decided to attend the Commission and give them her testimony because what impeded her from doing so was a matter of principles and she could not refuse a benefit for her family on such grounds. Laura´s moral dilemma was experienced by many other combatants after dictatorship and, for example, Han (2012) presents a similar case in her ethnography in La Pincoya.

Through their actions, *políticos* were then able to transmit a new conception of politics understood as a sacrificial activity. While the transformative and even cosmological political effects of sacrifice – or self-sacrifice – have been highlighted by several anthropologists (Bloch 1991, Holbraad 2014), La Victoria's case allows us to explore how the sacrificial act can emerge from below – from the powerless people in the country – and how it can affect a highly heterogeneous and even opposed social base. The high increase in political participation and the growth and proliferation of social and political organizations in the *población* during the 1980s is understandable if we

[43] *Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura* (National Commission on Political Prison and Torture), also called *Comisión Valech*.

think that this kind of politics permeates everyone in becoming a model for the multiple everyday sacrifices that people perform for each other in relationships with family, friends and neighbours. In other words, politics as sacrifice could transcend and scatter to other groups and people because affection in their social relationships has a sacrificial character in itself (see Chapter 1). Thus, while the strong affective relationships between some *pobladores* has led to deep separations from others, producing a fragmented social *población*, the same sentimental dynamic was also able to lead them to coincide in collective political action.

The 1980s uprising was, then, a massive and simultaneous collection of different sacrificial acts that shared the same notion of politics as virtue. In this sense, politics ceased to be just an issue for *políticos* and turned into an important matter for everyone. However, as we saw, this conception was completely tied to the existence of the dictatorship. Once the plebiscite determined the end of dictatorship, this notion of politics lost its ground and people, instead of fighting politically, started to work hard to improve the economic conditions of their families and to use credit to buy several goods in order to have access to a better quality of life (Han 2012). In this new context, politics was increasingly viewed not only as a meaningless activity but also as a selfish one. The complex, contradictory, but especially tragic condition of *políticos* in this new environment will be addressed in the next chapter.

The whole of my ethnographic experience in the *población* was marked by the collective and personal events experienced by *pobladores* during the 1980s in the form of funny stories, common anecdotes, peaceful talks, active discussions, deep remembrances and acts of memory that were full of symbols. In this chapter, I have intended an approximation to these events from the past, knowing that this exercise will always be fragmentary and inconclusive. However, due to their importance and the active presence of these memories in *pobladores'* current lives, I was, I would say, ethnographically forced to delve into it. Finally, I think their current pervasiveness lies in the fact that, for many *pobladores*, and especially for *políticos*, the dictatorship period represents the last moment in which they felt they were the main actors in national politics and history.

## Chapter 5: Losing control: living politics as a tragedy

During my time in the field, I established strong and affective connections with former and current communist militants and other *políticos*. Like other *pobladores, políticos* work in ordinary jobs: they are construction workers, public transport and private drivers, sellers in the local market, house cleaners, students, low-grade officials in the council or are unemployed or pensioned. However, they are indisputably different from other *pobladores* because the groups they belong to or have belonged to are recognized as permanently and almost exclusively interested in local and/or national politics. Most *políticos* actively participated in the protests against the dictatorship during the 1980s, when they showed an impressive political commitment in opposing the military regime and fighting for the recovery of democracy and the transformation of Chilean society (see Chapter 4). Living in the *población*, I had the opportunity to have countless conversations with some of them: those who are still participating in political organizations (like my friends) and those who have retired from active politics. In all these conversations, I found quite similar views and reflections regarding the collective events they lived through and, in general, on the *población's* trajectory. Some of these reflections also transcended the space of *políticos*', as I could hear them from other people and within other groups (for example, from my neighbours). Here, I would like to highlight two of the most oft-repeated stories that people used to tell to explain the recent past and its effects on the current situation of the *población* and the country.

**Story 1:** During the 1980s, many people from the *población* were involved in the struggle confronting dictatorship. In fact, this struggle and the actions it encompassed (protests, armed actions, political organization, community education, cultural events, etc.) were the direct cause of the fall of the dictatorship. However, although some people consider such a victory to have been possible due to the work of the *población* as a whole (each group and person contributed according to their own possibilities and principles), most of *políticos* think that not everyone was committed in the same way with the struggle. According to them, those who are actually responsible for the end of the dictatorship, the people who 'did it' – which means those who risked their lives – are few, and they certainly are not the ones that nowadays are constantly saying

'what they did' out loud (in the way professional politicians did after 1990 and to this day). Thus, many *pobladores* currently say that everyone who talks about what he/she personally did in those times is either lying or overemphasizing his/her participation. Rather, they say that it is certain that these people did not do anything important and are just resting on 'the brave ones' shoulders'. At the same time, *políticos* say that they know who were the ones really involved in the struggle – those who really risked their lives – and normally the speaker places themselves among this group. As Beatriz puts it, 'today the well-known adage is met: after the battle, all are Generals'.

**Story 2:** Between the end of dictatorship and the first years after the return to democracy (1990), a new scourge appeared in the *población*: drugs, especially cocaine *pasta base*. Although drugs had always existed within the *población*, this new extremely addictive and cheap drug was quickly embraced by many people (especially the young) and was widely disseminated throughout the *población*. But this situation was not a product of chance. This drug was deliberately introduced by state agents (the police or intelligence apparatuses – it is not completely clear) in order to undermine social and political organizations and the political commitment that people from La Victoria had developed during the hard years of the dictatorship. The effect of this action was immediate: from one second to the next, the *población* started to be inhabited by 'zombies' (addicts), while former groups of friends became drug gangs and fought each other over the control of the territory (and the business). Moreover, many *políticos* became either addicts or dealers (or both). In a context of high insecurity because of the gangs, with most of the young people and some former *políticos* involved in drugs consumption and numerous families hit by this scourge, politics as it was known in the past was – and still is today – simply impossible. Thus, the *pobladores*' political commitment and participation, traits that the dictatorship had not been able to defeat in 17 years, were easily and quickly annulled by drugs at the beginning of the 1990s. For some *políticos*, the introduction and spread of *pasta base* was the final phase of a defeat that had started with the betrayal of professional politicians to mobilized grassroots, a betrayal that occurred when they signed a pact with the military in order to lead a peaceful transition to democracy.

Perhaps because of the fact that both stories were incredibly widespread in the *población* – especially, but not solely, among *políticos* – and that I heard them many times in informal conversations, interviews and focus group (I even read them in books), I always had the intuition that they could be internally connected in some way. I thought that they were linked beyond the fact that both are interpretations of the *población*'s recent history and that one comes after the other. When we examine them together, in my opinion, a central connection may be observed: while in the first one the agents that perform the action are the organized *pobladores* who struggled and finally defeated the dictatorship; in the second story the agent who executes the action is the state (the professional politicians or an unknown organization within it) which corroded and annulled *pobladores'* political organization and participation. In other words, taken together they portray a switch in terms of the agent responsible for the central events of the story and the recipient of the actions: from *pobladores* towards the state in the first one, from the state towards *pobladores* in the second one. Thus, making an analogy with grammar, *pobladores* placed themselves as the subject of the sentence during the 1980s and as the object after the 1990s.

It is not my intention to evaluate whether these or other stories are factually true or not. Besides it being impossible to effectively determine the first objective causes of past events, such a task is ethnographically senseless as our first and foremost research sources are people's different opinions and interpretations of their lives. Therefore, in this case I am just trying to show the movement that *pobladores* perceive regarding the responsibility (the ascribed agent) for the *poblacion*'s fundamental events between two different historical moments. In my opinion, this movement suggests a transformation in *pobladores*' comprehension of the effects or the consequences of their everyday decisions and actions. Put simply, since *pobladores* are not responsible for the current order (as they were during dictatorship) but responsibility lies with a rather unknown and uncontrolled force, then no one could demand of them to follow any particular behaviour or to be ethically consistent in their everyday decisions and actions. At this point, a grey zone in their ordinary ethics is opened for accepted inconsistencies, inconstancies and contradictions. Agreeing with Laidlaw (2014) that every ethic contains internal inconsistencies and contradictions, I think that what makes this movement within the *pobladores*' ethic very interesting is that the

transformation is described as abrupt and radical, and as affecting the whole *población* at the same time. It may be seen as abrupt because *pobladores* say that this happened from one second to the next. As Gabriela states, 'One week we were working politically in our organizations in a much-mobilized *población*... and the following week everything disappeared, people stopped participating and organizations were left empty'. Also, it was radical due to the previous strong political commitment that characterized *pobladores* when, according to themselves, they were willing to risk their lives in the fight against the dictatorship. And finally, the transformation reached the whole *población* because of the hegemony that *políticos*, and especially communists, had over other groups in the 1980s (see Chapter 4).

In this chapter, I will explore the ethical inconsistencies, inconstancies and contradictions of *pobladores* in general and particularly of *pobladores políticos* in everyday life. I will show that although they consider that they have maintained their strong ethical principles and political positions regarding the *población* and the country, they must confront a context in which acting according to these principles is nonsense, as anything they do cannot modify a world that does not depend on them. Through ethnographic examples, I will illustrate how *políticos* come to realize their everyday inconsistencies and I will show that they deal with them in two different forms. The first way, which is represented especially but not exclusively by non-active *políticos*, emerges from the consideration that because they are no longer responsible for the world as it is nowadays, then there is no problem in living their everyday lives following a lighter ethic, behaving more or less as any other *poblador*, while sending into a distant future the moment in which they will act according to their actual convictions and beliefs (as they say they acted in the past). This temporal displacement allows them to generate two different ethics – one for the present and one for the future – and through this to attenuate the everyday contradictions between what they believe and what they do (or not do). The second response to this problem comes particularly from politically active *políticos* who criticize the first position, arguing that to rest in an improbable future without acting in the present is an even more critical contradiction and just a false trick in order not to act properly in the present. Nevertheless, active *políticos* behave in an incredibly inconsistent and inconstant way, suggesting thus that they, like the others, also inhabit an unchangeable world. In this

context, they live politics as a tragedy, as an inevitable and well-known everyday path towards a tragic fate (their defeat).

Finally, I will return to the moment that *políticos* mention as the time when everything changed for them (1990), when they consider they lost control over their own lives and the *población* as a whole. In this point, I will show that *políticos* still inhabit that time, re-instantiating the very same moment in meetings and political rituals. Paley (2001) has pointed out that a paradox of post-dictatorship Chile has been the virtual disappearance from the political arena of popular sectors and social movements, including *pobladores*. These sectors, that were protagonists of national political processes at least since the 1950s, disappeared exactly at a moment that seemed to be one of openness for political activity: the return to democracy. This disappearance has commonly been explained as an effect of external forces over *pobladores* – especially neoliberal adjustment and the institutional and social limitations of the new democracy – which transformed *pobladores´* lives, de-ideologizing and depoliticizing them and atomizing or destroying their organizations. Moving away from these explanations, in this chapter I try to show that, from within the *población*, this paradox could be understood as the impossibility for *políticos* to transcendentalize, give meaning to or make effective their political activity in a context of politics as tragedy. It is this impossibility that forces them to act inconsistently in the present while waiting for a future time in which they will regain control over their lives and the *población*.

**Watching television**

Amanda and Manuel had a long history of political commitment, like other *pobladores políticos* in La Victoria. They actively participated as communist militants in the struggle against the dictatorship and lived through dangerous circumstances over the 1980s, particularly Manuel who – like other *pobladores* – had to leave the *población* and stay clandestine for some time because the military were looking for him. Therefore, in their everyday conversation they usually denoted their left-wing position and ideas using, for example, the concept of 'class' to speak of the cultural space they belong to, and the concept of '*desclasado'* (de-classed or classless) to refer to those who deny their popular or *poblacional* origins. Within their house, several portraits of left-wing heroes (Che Guevara, Salvador Allende and Fidel Castro) decorate their

walls, while in their library it is possible to find books by Lenin and Marx alongside those of the history of the Chilean Communist Party and others regarding the crimes of the military during dictatorship. Considering this ethical and political environment, probably one of the first out-of-place or surprising behaviours that I found after arriving in their house was the extensive use of television. In particular, I found it strange how they co-existed almost continuously with TV shows and showbiz personalities that represented, in many cases, a completely different ethical and political world from their own.

A normal weekday at Amanda and Manuel's home starts early in the morning with Bruno and Carolina having a quick breakfast before going to their jobs. Later, between 8.30 and 9am, Amanda and Manuel usually have breakfast together, either listening to the news on the radio or watching some morning entertainment show on television. After Manuel has left for work, Amanda turns off the television and takes a shower or does some housework while listening to one of her favourite left-wing singers or bands. At 10.30 or 11 o'clock Amanda turns the television on again to watch one of the showbiz programmes common on Chilean channels at that hour of the day while slowly starting to cook lunch. Most of the time she just listens to the television, stopping her work from time to time to watch something that has caught her attention. With some of the information that she has heard on the showbiz programme Amanda goes out (sometimes more than once) to buy some ingredients to complete the lunch preparation, and talks to neighbours and friends about what has happened concerning some showbiz personalities or about some new information regarding other neighbours. While Amanda is on the street, inside the house the television remains on. Manuel sometimes comes back for lunch around 1-1.30pm, depending on the proximity of his job and the progress of his work (he works as an independent builder). Manuel then watches the showbiz for a while, waiting for the afternoon news. Usually they both have lunch watching the news. After the news, afternoon soap operas start and, as Manuel leaves, Amanda sits on the armchair to watch two of them or until she falls sleep. At 5pm, she turns off the television to take a nap or to do some work on her laptop while listening to some music. Other days, she turns the television back on pretty soon in order to watch the afternoon showbiz programmes. One hour later,

Amanda goes to buy some bread and other groceries for the *once*.[44] She spends more than an hour talking again with the neighbours and visiting her family. Meanwhile, Manuel, Carolina and Bruno begin to arrive home. At 7pm, almost everyone is in the house, and the television is turned on again and remains on during the *once* and until everyone has gone to sleep at 1 or 2 in the morning. Although there are many variation depending on the season and on the days when Amanda has to go to work or to the street market, in a normal day in their house the television remains off for approximately four hours. During weekends, when almost everyone is in the house, this time is even shorter.

It is important to note that this behaviour of watching television all day and doing everyday activities while the television is on is completely normal and widespread in *pobladores*' domestic life. I do not remember any time that I went into a house in the *población* and the television was not on. In fact, all of the interviews that I carried out in *pobladores*' houses were with the television on in the background. For this reason, Amanda and Manuel did not consider themselves as people who particularly watched a lot of television.

Besides the incredible amount of time that my host family spent watching television, what impressed me most about this behaviour was their regular uncritical acceptance of the people, shows, opinions and situations on television, which completely contrasted with their own declared ethical positions. Thus, watching television with them I felt, especially at the beginning of my fieldwork, that while I was angry or bothered with some of the shows or people on television, they rather seemed to be enjoying the shows, laughing with some famous people or finding interesting or special some of their opinions and positions. Sometimes I had to withhold comments on situations or people from the television because the family were talking about them in a sympathetic way, justifying their behaviours or opinions on different grounds normally based on well-known situations or problems in the lives of these celebrities. In fact, what bothered me most was not the people on television themselves, but how, in the everyday life, my clearly politically-self-defined host family enjoyed these

[44] *Once* (or elevenses) is the 'evening tea' which is taken as a dinner in most Chilean homes. For a full description see Chapter 1.

thoughtless shows without any ideological inhibitions. I must admit, however, that critical views were normal when we were watching the news (especially political news) and sometimes they also timidly appeared during other shows.

In her research, Ashley (2014) has shown not only the widespread and permanent use of television in La Victoria and other Chilean *poblaciones*, but also how people elaborate certain regimes of political criticism when they are watching apparently apolitical programmes. Lull (1990), who conducted the first ethnographic research of TV watching in the US, also realized how people were not passive when receiving television messages and they continually modified the themes according to their own positions. In Latin America, much research has been conducted regarding the *telenovelas* phenomenon, showing how these have engaged in themes that were considered social and politically crucial for audiences, helping to produce public debate (Acosta-Alzuru 2011, Hamburger 2000, La Pastina 2004, Ortega 1998, Schelling 2004). Although Ashley's research is also related to *telenovelas*, she found it relevant to concentrate on how several consecutive programmes connect with each other, producing interstitial spaces for creative critique and reflection on national politics (Ashley 2014). The next ethnographic example is just one of the many moments in the *población* when acritical TV shows turned problematic, not so much because they allowed political criticism but because they reflected in *políticos'* eyes their own everyday inconsistencies.

One evening we were watching television as normal when, in the talk-show the family liked to watch, a long interview started with the brother of the former millionaire right-wing Chilean president, Sebastian Piñera. This person is a well-known TV personality in Chile and is colloquially called 'Negro Piñera'. At the beginning of the interview, Amanda and Manuel started talking and laughing at the typical comments that people make about this man: that he is always at parties, that he is lazy and has never worked in his life because he has a millionaire brother, that his girlfriends are always young, silly, blonde girls, that he is an alcoholic and addicted to drugs, etc. Manuel wondered aloud about how many drugs this person had tried in his life, and how much he must have enjoyed his parties and having so many women. As the interview progressed, Amanda and Manuel seemed to be enjoying the show, commenting on his opinions,

laughing at his jokes, discussing his stories and his connection with other TV personalities. I, on the contrary, was more and more upset, not only by the show and the banality of the interviewee, but also because I had thought that what he represented to me (the showbiz, the right-wing, the thoughtlessness of the post-dictatorship) was the same that he represented for Amanda and Manuel. How could they enjoy watching an untalented so-called musician whose only merit was being part via kinship of the most conservative groups of the Chilean elite?

Later on, the interviewer revealed that Negro Piñera had been invited to the show to promote a new album that he had recorded with new versions of some famous Chilean songs. The interviewer then asked him to play some songs and he began with a song written by Patricio Manns, one of Amanda's favourites, a left-wing singer and composer. For the first time, she noted that the situation was ridiculous, that this guy should not be singing that song. Manuel replied by laughing at Amanda because of her declared love for Patricio Manns. After Manns' song, Negro Piñera stated that one of his greatest musical influences was Víctor Jara, a left-wing singer and composer killed by the military immediately after the coup d'état in 1973. Piñera then began to sing one of Jara's most famous songs. Instantaneously, the atmosphere in the house changed: Piñera had gone over a limit, using a left-wing and communist symbol, such as Víctor Jara, of the highest human ideals to perform on a superficial show on the television. To Amanda, the situation was no longer just a little ridiculous but a horribly bad joke, noting that Negro Piñera did not have the moral integrity to perform a song by Víctor Jara. Manuel also looked upset with the situation and after a gesture of disapproval, he stayed silent. I felt relieved, as finally the veil over the connection between these two completely separate ideological worlds had fallen. However, despite that I would have liked to change the channel, Manuel and Amanda stoically endured the time during which the song lasted and continued watching the show.

Contrary to what may be thought, watching television in the *población*'s houses was not a passive or solitary activity. Observing *pobladores* and watching television with my host family and with other friends and *pobladores*, I realized that this is a very social and dialogical activity. It is much like a conversation, both with your companions (the people who are watching television with you) and the people from

the television. In my opinion, the extensive and widespread use of television in the *población* rests on the possibility of having a similar experience to that of the *población*'s sociability within the domestic space. Thus, *pobladores* relate to TV personalities as if they were part of their network of relationships, and comment with other *pobladores* on their lives as if they were actual neighbours. In this sense, although the television may be portraying a completely different reality from the daily life in the *población* and although the ethical frames may be dissimilar or antagonistic with each other, *pobladores* do not experience watching television as one of alterity but as part of their own typically shared experience of everyday life. The television is just another space in which the conversation between neighbours occurs or, more precisely, is a device that dynamically spreads new and old conversations and opinions between *pobladores*.

In this social frame, my example of watching television with Amanda and Manuel can be better understood. This was, in the first place, one of a thousand similar conversations that occur in the *población* every day. Thus, I think that this case portrays a more general phenomenon in which the process of interchanged opinions, discussions and ethical reviews about other people's current lives, tends to relax that which is expected, in general, from others. This permanent everyday force allows them to understand (although not necessarily to fully accept) different life trajectories, different decisions and different personal ethical frames. The television, alongside allowing certain spaces of criticism, has been especially successful in producing such discussions and acceptance regarding other people' lives. But more important than television itself, the actual network of relationships in which *pobladores* are inscribed, tends to release some spaces in which people can accept much more from their friends (diverse behaviours) or expect less from them. This means that Amanda and Manuel would like but would not expect from others, a strict political commitment in everyday life. And conversely, in the same way others cannot demand the equivalent from Amanda and Manuel. In practical terms, this has helped to produce a distance between a very consistent ethical corpus that *políticos* still hold today (with a strong image of how things should be) and a lighter and more homogeneous (shared) everyday ethics. In the example, we saw how Manuel and Amanda enjoyed a TV show (Piñera's interview), as Amanda and all of my *político* friends and *pobladores* in general do all

the time. However, as we will see later, this separation contained several contradictions, as we saw when Negro Piñera sang Víctor Jara's song. In this case, the accepted ethical separation stopped working and showed the deep contradiction that hides within when both spaces are mixed up, letting Manuel and Amanda immediately reject the show that they had previously enjoyed uncritically.

Among my *político* friends, beyond the permanent force that erodes ethical limits, what has fundamentally permitted the production of this light, homogenous ethic has been, in my opinion, a temporal displacement. While this ethic has been installed in the present, the rigid, consistent convictions have been sent towards the future (and also, as we will see, to the past). Thus, if each ethic corresponds to different moments, then no contradiction is possible. I could observe this many times during my fieldwork. For example, Manuel used to tease me when I complained because I did not like the meal. He always finished with the question, 'What are you going to do when we are in the jungle doing the revolution? You are going to have to eat anything, and sometimes nothing.' (obviously drawing on an image of the Cuban Revolution, as in Chile there is no jungle). And my friend Ernesto, when we had our long conversations on politics normally concluded, 'What is happening now is not so important. The question is on which side of the trench are you going to be when the moment arrives.' As we can see, the temporal movement does the job of allowing for the dissolution of ethical limits to act in current everyday life without apparent contradiction with the self-defined ethic. However, for many *políticos* this is just a trick and the contradiction remains there as, according to the strong ethical convictions, no kind of future is possible without acting or fighting politically in the present.

Finally, the same ethical displacement has produced a revision of the past. As the present is understood not as contradictory but ultimately separated from the consistent ethic, all that *pobladores políticos* really have today to uphold their consistent distinctions and legitimize themselves in front of others is the *población*'s politically committed past. This current need has not only nourished the stories regarding the origins of the *población* and the struggle against dictatorship during the 1980s, but it has also produced a competition regarding who actually risked their lives, as we could see in one of the introductory stories of this chapter. In fact, I see this compulsion for

portraying themselves as the truly consistent ones in the past ('those who did the things that had to be done') as another form of compensating for their current inconsistency.

**The inconstancy of *pobladores*' souls**

During my time in La Victoria I participated as a full-time member in an organization that worked as both a cultural centre and a Communist Party cell. At the same time, I was able to sporadically take part in other political group meetings, in diverse open assemblies and inter-group representatives' gatherings. In this way, I met most of the current active *pobladores políticos* of La Victoria although I became friends with only some of them. Throughout that time, I lived with them the everyday difficulties they faced in order to organize themselves, raise political consciousness among the *población*'s inhabitants, establish links with other organizations and, in general, foster collective action amongst *pobladores*. As it may be imagined, most of these current active *políticos* were part of the generation that confronted the dictatorship in the 1980s while others, the younger ones, were mostly kin relations of the former ones. For example, my group was composed – excluding myself – of 18 or 19 proper members (the largest formal political organization in the *población*). Of these members, seven were too young to have participated, or had not even been born by the time of the dictatorship protests. Of these seven, only one (Inti) did not have a kinship connection with a former communist fighter of the 1980s who was either part of the group or retired from formal organizations. And Inti, like me, had recently arrived to live in Santiago and the *población*. These kinds of connections are so normal that the first time I met my friends some thought I was Manuel's son. Thus, it is not really expected for random people from the *población* to become interested in politics and in participating in formal organizations, but even if someone could oddly feel attracted to these activities he/she would not be allowed to integrate into any formal group without a kinship or strong friendship connection (the latter also was a possibility but I never saw it during fieldwork). Inti and I were different just because we were not originally from the *población* and therefore the limits that separated my communist friends from other *pobladores* simply did not apply to us.

But, despite the enclosure of these groups or, in other words, the impossibility of expanding beyond themselves and the incredible difficulties of surpassing the barriers

that separated them from each other, their existence, their political commitment and their permanent work in the *población* seemed to challenge not only the general interpretation regarding the depoliticization processes in the country but also my own perception regarding the fact that the temporal displacement and its consequent separation between two ethical frames reached all *políticos*. Rather, these people were currently active, participating in political meetings, producing socio-cultural activities, designing political strategies and movements, acting in different fronts and, in general, spending a great part of their personal time with the purpose of mobilizing *pobladores*' minds and bodies. In simple terms, they seemed to be currently acting according to their ethical distinctions and positions, not in a distant future as other *pobladores* and many former *políticos* did. However, after working alongside them for a long time, becoming their friend and sharing important moments, I could say that my interpretation of the dual ethic applied even better to them but in a completely different sense. Unlike other people, the active *pobladores* had to confront the terrible contradiction that rests behind *pobladores*' everyday lives, incarnating more than anyone the impossibility of acting consistently in the present. This leads them to live politics as tragedy, and this is manifest in several everyday comments, attitudes and actions that still impress me today.

Every week I participated in two meetings with my group in the community centre of the Communist Party in La Victoria. Although in formal terms our membership numbered around 20 people, normally there was an average of ten attendants at each meeting. In fact, the number of people that arrived at each meeting was completely random, and sometimes without any apparent reason (no relevant upcoming activity) almost everyone could be there. Other times just a few showed up and, for example, I was present in meetings of just three or four people. Sometimes, when something important had to be discussed, Laura or Ines phoned each member encouraging them to attend. However, this technique did not ensure their attendance. Some people could be present in every meeting for one month and then completely disappear the following one. Others used to participate in one or two meetings each month. Although the list of members that would attend the next meeting was completely random, there was a pair of people who had a pattern of attendance. Francisco, for example, did not like the cold, so he normally disappeared during winter and, with the first warm days of

the spring, he started to attend again. Probably because of this randomness, to attend a meeting or not was not seen as a sign of anything in particular, and even if someone did not appear for a long time, no one asked them about it or felt they had to question her/his membership. When the person returned, he/she was treated as if they had been present all the time and they did not normally give an excuse for not coming. Everyone acted on this issue with extreme caution regarding other members' lives, not demanding explanations for their not coming, as if each suspected that the next person not coming could be oneself. This attitude was completely different from other situations when the group behaved as a moral court strictly controlling members' positions and actions (as we saw in Chapter 3). Likewise, in some meetings the importance of regular attendance at the meetings was argued, either for the functioning of the group or for the purposes pursued by it. In these cases normally everyone enthusiastically agreed to this statement and committed to attend regularly at the meetings and other activities. However, this did not imply anything for the next meeting and randomly it could involve only a few members.

I observed a similar behaviour in the issue of punctuality. It was tacitly accepted that people arrived late, so that the start of every meeting was delayed by between one and two hours. Thus, if, at a meeting, we agreed the next one would be on Monday at 8pm for example, we all knew that the meeting would start at the earliest at 9pm or maybe later. For this reason, people normally started to arrive one hour late in respect to the agreed time. On some occasions some members could arrive really late (even when the meeting was already finishing) and neither in this extreme delay nor in a more standard one, did anyone ask for explanations for their behaviour. However, as with the attendance issue, the starting time was variable as well. I remember, for example, specific meetings in which I took the usual precaution of not arriving too early, but when I actually arrived (one hour later then the meeting time) the meeting had already begun and they were in the middle of a conversation. For no apparent reason, in these cases almost everyone had arrived earlier than usual and they had started the meeting trusting that if someone else would appear, they could join in later. At some meetings, I also participated in conversations about the importance of punctuality, in which everyone agreed and promised to arrive on time, although afterwards the starting time remained unpredictable.

Probably more remarkable than the attendance and punctuality issues, what impressed me most about the group's daily work was how they behaved with regard to the activities and the projects that we agreed to carry out. Thus, in a standard meeting we talked about several new and old activities or ideas that we could execute over the next days or weeks. When one of the activities or ideas was approved by the group, the next step was to evaluate what we needed to do in order to carry it out and to assign personal and collective responsibilities. However, something strange used to happen between this meeting and the activity itself or the next meeting in which we discussed the progress of the assigned tasks. Everyday life tended to randomize the actions and the chores that some members personally or collectively had agreed to fulfil. Many times, people simply had not carried out any of the actions they had committed to. And, unless the task which should have been executed was something urgent or really central for the group, people normally did not give any explanation for not having done them. More accurately, they gave no explanation because they did not feel that what they had done was wrong. When sometimes, after a meeting, I asked the person directly about an un-executed activity he/she usually answered that they had no time during the week or had completely forgotten about it. In fact, forgetting was a very common situation, both for the person in charge of a task and for the group as a whole. Thus, at several other meetings, an activity that the group had previously agreed to perform and sometimes had been completely enthusiastic about was simply forgotten (not even mentioned) and therefore the specific tasks that people had said they would do remained unnoticed. In this context, the group had many projects, ideas and activities which were left incomplete or in stand-by, while others just disappeared forever as we never talked about them again.

One of the projects that was always present during my time in the cultural centre was the idea of forming a *batucada* (a street percussion band). This was one of the first ideas of the cultural centre after its formation, as this kind of ensemble is very popular in Chile today among young people and is also useful for gathering different people together for all kinds of activities (political, social, cultural, etc.). It is basically a way to make a lot of loud noise and call for people's attention. In order to form a *batucada* the cultural centre needed two elements: many percussion instruments and people who were able and available to play them. When I joined the cultural centre, the second of

these requirements had been fulfilled by Carmen who, through her daughter, had formed a group of young people and kids from the *población* who wanted to play in the band. However, the problem was the instruments, which were too expensive for the cultural centre's budget. So, at some point they had decided to make the instruments themselves and had hired a tinsmith to make the metallic parts of the drums. But the measurements of the final metallic pieces proved to be too large for the *batucada* drums and we still needed all the remaining parts to make proper drums (parts that were very expensive as well). In all these activities they had spent at least eight months and the kids who were going to be part of the *batucada* had stopped coming to the cultural centre meetings because they were bored of waiting for the instruments.

Sometime later, although the failed project had faded into the background, we were continually reminded that we ought to do something about the project by the metallic parts of the drums and the knowledge of the difference it would have made to have the *batucada* working during other activities. Thus, from time to time we discussed it and finally we decided to carry out a fundraising event to buy the drum skins. Everyone showed up to the fundraising activity (selling fried fish for lunch) and the event was a success. The second part of the plan was to check the price of the skins in different shops, a task that was divided between four members, including myself. At the next meeting, I was the only one that had carried out the task. We had a discussion about it but could not make a decision without knowing other prices. After one month I decided to speak at a meeting saying that the *batucada* project could wait no longer and I suggested buying the drum skins in one of the shops that I had already contacted. They agreed with me and the following week I took the money and bought the drum skins. However, although we had different drums pieces, we still needed to get many other parts and also to correct the diameter of the metallic bodies. As we did not have more money for that, Julio suggested that he could build the rest of the pieces and assemble the drums. When I left the *población* four months later, the cultural centre still did not have one proper drum.

One last example is that of a project that was completely forgotten by the group. In late-November, the neighbourhood council started a project of a local radio that would

work inside its building. As they had only the radio frequency and the basic equipment, but not the people to perform the shows, they invited the cultural centre to use the space and produce a radio show. The invitation was accepted by the cultural centre and there were six people interested in participating: Rulo, Nicanor, Pato, Ernesto, Ines and me. We decided to have a meeting the following Wednesday in order to talk about the show. Everyone showed up on time that day and, after a brainstorm, we created the idea of a cultural and news show in which Nicanor would be the host. We also decided to record a pilot the next week in order to have a demo of how the show would be and to see if we were able to speak well in front of the microphone.

The next Wednesday, I was walking towards the community centre when I saw a long queue going out from the Neighborhood Council House. In the queue, I saw Ines and I approached her. She said that the queue was to register to participate in the Christmas fair, a traditional fair in which *pobladores* sell different objects to make some money. I reminded her that we had to record the pilot show and she told me that she would go to the community centre once she finished everything there. But she also acknowledged that she had not fulfilled the task required for her to record her part of the show, due to lack of time. While I was talking to her, also in the queue I saw Pato, another member of the cultural centre and part of the radio show. He had also failed to carry out his task for the show and although he would be at the community centre later, he would be unable to record his part that day. When I arrived at the meeting, the community centre was closed and no one else was there. I had to wait for half an hour until Ernesto showed up with the keys and together we began to wait for the rest of the people involved in the project. This took a long time. As we waited, we discussed postponing the recording of the pilot until the following week as no one was there (not even Nicanor, the presenter) and Ines and Pato had not completed their tasks. Later, we decided to say this to the others but we never talked about a specific day or time, and the weeks started to pass by. We concentrated on other activities and projects and people forgot that on that Wednesday of December we came close to recording our first radio show.

The idea behind showing all these incomplete projects and activities is not to criticize my friends, their work or their personal attitudes at all. In fact, alongside many failed

projects I remember many successful ones for which everyone showed up on time, committed to their tasks and the objectives were accomplished in an excellent way (I have described some of these activities and projects in previous chapters). My point here is to portray the experiences that led me to develop a profound feeling of perplexity and strangeness regarding the social and political activity in the *población,* not only related to my communist friends but I could also say that I saw and felt the same way in all my meetings and conversations with other active *políticos* during my time in La Victoria. In my current perspective, I think that all these experiences have a common pattern – the incredible inconstancy of *pobladores políticos.* Thus, as I said before, they appeared one day as deeply committed and enthusiastic with the group or with a specific activity, while the next day they seemed unconcerned with it or they simply disappeared from political activity for a while. Therefore, I am not suggesting in any way that they lacked political commitment in general, but that what defined them was just their inconstancy. This made the result of any particular action or activity unpredictable.

Moreover, they applied the inconstancy frame to the internal work of the organization, not expecting from other members a long-lasting vow over time but only a permanent inconstancy. This is the reason why the organization seemed to lack internal memory, and each meeting was an reactualization or a reboot of the group as it was formed by the people who attended that particular meeting. Likewise the projects and activities discussed and performed at each meeting were the only ones that existed. This explains the facility with which they forgot what had been considered of utmost importance in past meetings. In short, what was or was not relevant, why something was relevant, what the strategies and activities should be to carry it out, were all questions that were basically defined for the group and the conversation at each meeting, and therefore varied significantly from one to the other, as I have showed in this section.

In addition to political meetings and rituals, *políticos* inhabited everyday life as any other *poblador*. In these other times, *políticos* were subject to an oblivion process of what they had lived and committed themselves to do during the meetings, allowing them to live an ordinary life based in what I have called ‘a lighter homogeneous ethical frame’. However, my friends felt compelled to repeatedly return to the meetings

because, according to Manuel, 'If we stay at home nothing is going to ever change'. In the same vein, Laura told me once in a meeting, 'Being here is our responsibility with us and with *pobladores'*. I could feel this commitment many times, in their extended discourses over the importance of political work for the *población* and the Party and in their naive enthusiasm with some of the actions that they wanted to develop. But at the same time, they admitted to me that they did not have any hope that their projects, activities and actions would make any important difference in a world that was beyond their control. Thus, a large part of meeting time was used to propose possible paths to follow: while some of them said that they should concentrate on *pobladores*, other argued that their work must be focused on gaining more power within the Party; while some showed preference for producing educational activities for children, others said that it was better to focus on cultural activities for adults, etc. These kinds of controversies were never solved and they began anew in every meeting. Even more crucial, when I asked them at different moments how could the country effectively change, they always said that the only way was through the mysterious and random appearance of a figure that could bring everyone together, 'a leader such as Chavez in Venezuela'. However, they never mentioned their own work as *políticos* as a possibility.

As we saw before, many *políticos* have accepted the overall perception regarding the impossibility of acting politically in a context that does not depend on them and therefore have sent into the future the moment in which they will act according to their actual convictions and beliefs. Juan, a former communist, told me in an interview, 'After everything that I did I felt tired. I knew nothing else was possible. I retired from the party and from my organization here in the *población* and since then I follow the political situation waiting for a change in the correlation of power'. On the other hand, my communist friends and other active *políticos* still meet and organize political actions and activities even if they, like the other *políticos*, also consider that whatever they do will not change anything. In such a context, these *políticos* live politics as an everyday tragedy: a well-known and unavoidable path towards a tragic fate, their inevitable defeat. In my opinion, their attitude, although evidently contradictory, inconsistent and inconstant is as consistent as is currently possible with their ethical positions and political convictions.

**Losing control**

For *pobladores* in general, but especially for the communist and active *políticos* of the 1980s, one of the most central events in their lives both collectively and biographically was the fall of dictatorship. As we could see in the two stories presented in the introduction to this chapter, this huge event divided the *población*'s trajectory in two, changing the self-perceived position of *pobladores* in the world. Basically, we could describe this moment as an experience of dislocation or disorientation in the moral points of reference of *pobladores*' lives. In fact, confusion is firstly located in the heart of the event itself, as the two introductory stories seem to point out: the fall of the dictatorship meant the victory and the defeat of the *pobladores* at the same time. Thus, even today, this moment is remembered with a mix of joy and sadness by *pobladores*.

The importance of this event and the disorientation that it produced can be traced in *pobladores*' biographical histories. Sra. Margarita told me once that:

> When I watched Pinochet [the dictator] on the television handing the presidential sash to Aylwin [the first democratic president after dictatorship], I was in shock. Could you imagine? To Aylwin, a well-known *golpista* [people who had supported the coup d'état], I wanted to die. Everything for nothing. I went to bed that day and stayed there for a year. I was diagnosed with depression.

Also with depression as the final effect, Laura was released from jail – where she was tortured while pregnant – around that time, only to realize that not only the country but also the *población* had changed completely. Pedro and Manuel lived the process in a different way. In different stages and to different extents, they both became alcohol and drug addicts as many other *pobladores* at that time did. Meanwhile, Amanda and Ines felt compelled to abandon politics and to concentrate on their respective families, looking to build a 'better future for them' (more or less like many other *políticos* did). Similarly, Juan told me, 'I was in debt with my family. I had been away from them for a long time because of my political activity, so I had to come back and stay with them'. At that time, Francisco returned from exile to take care of his father. And Isabel, one of the leaders of the *pobladores* in the 1980s, had to confront the fact that in this new

reality that she had nothing, not even an education, and that she now had to find a job. According to Isabel:

> When we were in the 1980s, not having a job did not matter to us. In fact, people normally did not have one as the economic conditions were difficult. But also, we did not have time for that because we were fully concentrated on our political role. But overnight what had been normal was not so anymore. And we felt the requirement of having a job and at that moment we realized that we did not have anything that belonged to us.

As we can see, all of these stories are framed within a broader change that was operating by that time in people's perception of political activity. During the 1980s, *políticos* were seen as role models for people in the *población*, especially armed guerrillas among young generations (explaining the unusual increase in militants in different political groups and the formalization into politics of informal groups of friends, as I discussed in Chapter 4). However, after the fall of the dictatorship, *políticos* started to be seen as selfish people, interested only in power and money and unconcerned about their families. This perception was also shared by the *políticos* themselves. As Amanda said, 'Now if you spend lots of time with others in political meetings and activities, it is normal to think that you are not very interested in your family'. In other words, *políticos* had to confront a new reality in which they faced pressure in their everyday relationships to reorient their trajectories, a movement that they currently see as a loss of control over their lives. Paradoxically, they consider that the dictatorship, a time marked by military repression and lack of freedom, was a moment in which they achieved full control over their lives and the *población*. In Laura's words:

> It seems that we were so tight, contained and fully concentrated on our goal which was defeating the dictatorship that, when it fell, we experienced an explosion of freedom. People did whatever, they did not know how to handle this new kind of freedom. It was an uncontrolled situation for all us.

Thus, faced with this new context, some responded by simply becoming part of the stressful neoliberal labour market in order to improve their economic condition, some

became drug dealers or criminals and others had to confront drug addiction, depression and other mental illnesses.

So, while *políticos* retained most of their ethical and political distinctions, the new context presented them with a series of situations that contradicted their beliefs and, as we have seen, caused them to fall into deep contradictions. Amanda and Manuel, for example, were always very proud of having paid by themselves for Carolina's university studies, while at the same time considering that education should be guaranteed right provided free of charge by the state. However, the economic sacrifice their daughter's education required – a neoliberal action, as they pointed out themselves – was understood as a sign of their deep love and affection for her. In a similar way, and in one of her best ethnographic vignettes, Han (2012) shows how a *pobladora* buys different things through credit at a retail store in order to take care of the members of her family. It was in this way that the new neoliberal context – and its associated values – was able to penetrate into the lives of those who, in theory, were its greatest opponents. In my opinion, although deeply contradictory to the ethical principles of *políticos*, the new neoliberal values settled on the same affective base – that of their social relations – that had formerly allowed them to develop their committed struggle against dictatorship.[45]

As I described in Chapter 4, *políticos* during the 1980s, and primarily communist *pobladores*, made, within their groups, the decision to sacrifice themselves in confronting dictatorship (a whole politics sustained by the Communist Party called 'Mass Popular Rebellion'). This was presented to the *población* through highly ritualized acts (proclamations, food robbery, armed confrontation) that allowed them to indirectly surpass their own limits of affection that separated groups within the *población* – and still does nowadays. Altering the ethical distinction of different groups (church communities, criminal gangs and several other formal and informal groups),

[45] A thesis that would merit future exploration is in what measure neoliberalism is not experienced by *pobladores* as egoism, competition and banal consumerism (ideas that most *pobladores* reject) but as a space for the daily sacrifice for their loved ones (family, friends and neighbours), that is, mainly, as demonstration of affection.

they were able to encompass the whole *población* in an incredibly unequal fight against the military regime. Doing this, they felt they gained control over their lives.

In their stories, they appear to have been living a different temporality, a dangerous but exciting reality, full of codes, incredible exploits and heroes. When the dictatorship was falling, they were happy because of their victory but they also sensed that something was going wrong. Some of them even supported the plebiscite that began the transition to democracy, the first step into the professional politicians' betrayal. Juan explained to me, 'We discussed a possible betrayal but it did not matter to us. We thought that we could recreate our strength any time. Time has proven that we were wrong'. Thus, the political magic that they had created was over at the moment of the fall of dictatorship as it was based on the sacrifice that they had been making for ten years: without the dictatorship, their politics of sacrifice completely lost its meaning.

As they were theoretically no longer at risk, their actions were also no longer understood as sacrifice, especially and primarily for *políticos* themselves. *Políticos* eventually had to return to their homes. And, at that moment, they had to confront the reality of their everyday lives – they fell again into their limits of affection after having experienced an epic time. Although they had not achieved their final political goal – the revolution – and they maintained their ethical distinctions and political convictions in the new context, they started to consider themselves unable to retain access to the position that they had previously sustained, unable to make their political activities effective again. A few of them, like Juan and Pedro, continued their actions after 1990 for a while, but they quickly realized that this was senseless in the new context. Finally, they followed the same path as other *políticos* and retired from politically active life.

This account is a reconstruction that I developed after countless conversation with my friends and many other *políticos* during my time in the field. What I would like to highlight is that, contrary to the most accepted explanations for the disappearance of *pobladores* from the political arena after 1990, from *políticos'* actual experience of the change was not lived as a process of cultural change in *poblaciones* and the country in general, nor as an adjustment to the social and institutional conditions of the new democracy. Instead, it was experienced as a singular event that modified once and for all their ability to transcendentalise and give sense to their convictions and beliefs.

After that point it was simply impossible for them to believe anymore that they could act significantly or directly to change the world.

This event, had, according *to políticos,* important effects not only for themselves but also on the whole *población*. During the 1980s, *pobladores* in general had based a very strong ethics to follow in their lives around *políticos*' distinctions, though the boundaries between groups in the *población* remained. With the fall of the *políticos*, people felt an empty space and the need to create and follow new ethics that promised them a new sense of control over their lives. Although drugs had been part of the *población* for a long time, the new uncontrolled context opened up a space for the development of a new narco-ethic in which numerous groups of friends were re-converted into drug gangs. As Laura affirms, 'We saw how these groups were taking over our street corners and using the street, our place, as their place. But we could do nothing'. These highly profitable businesses, not only used money (and drugs) as bait for their members, but more importantly they took the same symbolic elements of the *políticos* to reproduce the idea of control within the new context. Thus, the guns that in the 1980s had symbolized *políticos'* control over their lives and their sacrifice at the front of the *población* were bought by the drug gangs with the narcotics money. Pedro, one of my friends in the *población*, was one of the *políticos* who sold some guns, and he explained to me, 'It seemed to me that it did not make sense anymore having those guns in democracy'. When 'Cara de Jarro', one of the biggest drug dealers in Chile and also an ex-neighbour, as he used to live close to my house in La Victoria, was arrested by the police after an armed confrontation around eight years ago, newspapers and TV news not only remarked on the huge fortune that he had amassed with his business but also that the police had found a great amount of war weapons, of USSR origin. Moreover, drug gangs used the idea of sacrifice to strengthen their convictions among their members, especially in relation to the permanent risk of confrontation with the police and other gangs.

In opposition to and in competition with the drug gangs, during the 1990s, Evangelical churches grew in number and also in the number of their members within La Victoria and other Chilean *poblaciones* (in my *cuadra* alone there were two churches). Although they had existed in La Victoria before that time, the lack of a clear hegemony

opened up a space for them as well. With different contents, they were able to reproduce the highly visual and expressive rituals that characterized *políticos'* groups during the 1980s, in contraposition to the hidden practices of the drug gangs. These rituals turned these churches into open spaces that could accept everyone and incorporate people into affectionate and solidary communities. As Sra. Juana, one of my neighbours told me, 'I moved to another church because a friend told me that they were more closely knit. I liked my other church, but I prefer this one, I feel better because the *hermanos* [brothers and sisters members of the church] care about you and whether you are well'. In fact, due to this openness, drug gangs and Evangelical churches are not completely opposed to each other, and some dealers are also Evangelicals. Another neighbour told me, 'Cara de Jarro was Evangelical and he used to go to the church at least once a week'.

**The effectiveness of political meeting and rituals**

In this chapter I have discussed the everyday inconsistencies and inconstancies of *pobladores políticos* (both active and retired) nowadays, showing that the fall of the dictatorship was the historical moment which they feel changed everything in their lives, losing the control they had achieved in the 1980s. As we saw in the last section, the loss of *políticos*' control or the end of their hegemony not only had huge effects on their own life trajectories but also on the whole *población*. However, contrary to what may be interpreted at this point, I consider that the dictatorship is not the key element to help us understand the process lived by the *pobladores* after or before its fall. As I stated in Chapter 4, following Schneider's research on Chilean *poblaciones* in the 1980s, not all *poblaciones* actually fought against the dictatorship. The central characteristic that all the mobilized *poblaciones* of the 1980s shared was the presence of members of the Communist Party among their inhabitants and political leaders (Schneider, 1995). Therefore, the dictatorship itself played only the role of the context in which *políticos*, and particularly communist *pobladores*, were able to develop an incredible and innovative device that emerged from within the *población*. This is the reason why I prefer to use the more ethnographically constructed concept of 'control' (as an attitude towards life) instead of 'agency', which in social sciences has the connotation of being the opposite to structure (Laidlaw, 2011).

From my perspective, what produced the experience of control among *políticos* in the 1980s was the ability to transcendentalise and make effective political meetings and rituals. In this sense, the temporality that they describe for that time is one that connects past, present and future in a way that transcends durational everyday time (Bloch 1977, Turner 1969). Lazar (2014) has described the same experience in other movements and political organizations in South America calling this temporality 'historical time'. Living in this temporality, *políticos* were able to surpass the limits of affection that inevitably separate them from other groups. In opposition to Bloch I consider that this ritual temporality is not necessarily related to social structure or to institutionalized power and can emerge from the more powerless people, as we have seen throughout this chapter.

On the contrary, the current experience of active *políticos* in political meetings and rituals is one of contradiction, inconsistency and inconstancy derived from their consideration that anything they do cannot modify a world that does not depend on them. In a context of politics as tragedy, political temporality is lived as a permanent present or, more likely, a stopped present. Firstly, this temporality is reminiscent of Lewis' 'culture of poverty' (1967), and the more recent descriptions of Day, Papataxiarchis and Stewart (1999) regarding different marginal people that lack orientation over the future and the past in their lives. However, in their work they highlight the autonomy and the sense of freedom that these people experience in their lives, while *políticos* feel exactly the opposite. As we saw previously, they feel unable to act according to their ethical and political positions or, in other words, they consider they have lost the control over their lives. In my opinion, their political meetings and rituals appear nowadays incomplete, unable to connect to the past and future and to recreate a mythic time, being instead persistently historically situated. And this moment of a stopped present is the exact minute after the fall of the dictatorship. The ritual time of politics just stopped its efficacy in that instant and has been immobile for 26 years. The dictatorship is, thus, still a huge and permanent presence in *pobladores*' lives as has been described in Paley's (2001) and Han's (2012) research on Chilean *poblaciones*, and by many pieces of research on the broader current Chilean context. My fundamental experience in these meetings and activities could be summed up in the fact that *pobladores* are still discussing what to do in this (not quite so) new context.

At the same time, they live politics as a tragedy, the only possibility in their minds when they lack control over their own world.

# Chapter 6: Popular power: building collective action in the *población*

Probably one of the most intriguing characteristics of the *población's* social life that I could observe and experience during my fieldwork was the deep divisions and widespread fragmentation of groups and people within La Victoria. Although, currently, this condition has been presented as a direct consequence of the economic, social and political transformations that were undertaken during dictatorship and maintained by post-dictatorship governments (interchangeably called shock doctrine, structural adjustment or neoliberal transformation), what I realized while living in the *población* was that the phenomenon was founded in a more permanent and profound dynamic through which persons are composed within the *población*.

As I have shown in Chapter 1, *pobladores*' social relationships are deeply sentimental and based primarily on affection (instrumental or functional relationships are impossible to conceive of in a transparent social world such as the *población*). At the same time, *pobladores* consider that every person has a limited amount of affection to distribute between family and friends and therefore these strong sentimental bonds with a few people lead to generating strong separations and divisions with other people and groups (see Chapter 2). Any expansion of a person's network of social relationships will inevitably strain previous relationships and will eventually lead to a betrayal (the end of a relationship). The *población's* social life is then highly fragmented into countless formal and informal groups indifferent or opposed to each other. In Chapter 3, I explored the case of one of this groups, a communist cell, in order to show that communism in the *población* is less an ideology than an ethical force sustained through strong relationships of family and friends. This example allowed me to suggest that through affective bonds, social relationships imprint ethical frames – distinctions, opinions and actions – which conduct those involved in them through their lives. In consequence and according to my general argument, neoliberal values (individualism, consumerism, competition) must be understood as contingent ethical contents sustained by several groups or networks of relationships, more than as the origin of divisions and social fragmentation. Han's ethnography is, in general, a demonstration that behind the neoliberal context and, for example, consumerist

behaviours, rest the affective bonds and the desire to be infinitely responsible for kin (Han 2012).

This fragmentation of the *población* is, in my opinion, as clear nowadays as it was in the past. Even when *pobladores* remember the epic moments of political mobilization before 1990 as times of unity, their stories are full of different groups, often opposed to one other, that may or may not act following common principles or objectives in any specific moment. In particular, during the 1980s, La Victoria was composed of different political groups (communists, socialists, Christian left, MIR), churches (Catholics, Evangelicals), several cultural centres, economic organizations (soup-kitchens, '*comprando juntos'* – buying together), armed political groups, groups of social-communitarian help, health organizations, criminal gangs, informal groups of friends, etc. Although some people may have adhered to more than one of these groups or, perhaps, one group may be considered to be part of a larger one – as with the several communist groups –, every group had its own specificity and acted according to its own agenda. In other words, the affective dynamic that strongly pledges and separates people in the *población* was as inevitable and unbreakable in the past as it is today (for evidence of this in the *toma* times and the 1980s see Chapter 2). Probably those times are remembered in such a way because *pobladores* actually emerged in the public national space or political arena as acting collectively – they could be seen as a united, organized and solidary corpus, as if the internal differences had disappeared or had been suspended.

However, as we saw in Chapter 4, *pobladores*' uprising was indeed a highly heterogeneous and coincidental collection of political actions performed by different groups that had in common an idea of politics as virtue. This was possible due to a 'collective ethical displacement' regarding politics and political violence, triggered by *políticos*' performances (in particular through their armed action) and understood, in the context of the dictatorship, as sacrificial acts. After dictatorship, fragmentation again became evident in the *población* as politics started to be seen as a meaningless and even a selfish activity. From that moment on, *políticos*' actions and rituals lost their effectiveness and they came to realize that whatever they did, they could not affect a world that did not depend on them anymore (Chapter 5).

The events experienced by *pobladores* from La Victoria over the last decades lead me to suggest three important points. First, collective political action in the *población* is actually something achievable despite *pobladores'* sentimental divisions and fragmentation. Second, collective action emerges – always understood in the fragmentary sense presented below – when politics comes to be conceived as a sacrificial activity, as a selfless act of pure giving. And third, this conception of politics is engendered through political action itself, that is, through specific performances that, in relation to the context, come to be considered as sacrifices. During the 1980s, *políticos*' reckless actions marked by the use of guns – and afterwards, every political action – were conceived as sacrificial acts under the existence of a highly repressive dictatorship. Likewise, when *pobladores* took the land and formed the *población* in 1957 the whole process was lived as a sacrificial action. *Pobladores* had to confront the police and the government (because the action was illegal), the climatic conditions and their lack of shelter (because they were poor and the place was just an empty field – several babies died during the first weeks), and the contempt and humiliation from the inhabitants of other nearby *poblaciones* and the authorities. All this, just in order to get the bare minimum: a place to live, a dignified life (Cortes 2014, Farias 1989, GIMP 2006, GSP 1989, GTLV 2007 and my own interviews). *Políticos* not only led this process, but they were also seen as the most committed and those who sacrificed more. Amanda speaks in these terms about Uncle Sergio Mori, the communist leader who saved a place for her mother, helped her to move to the *toma* and who 'did not even get a place for himself!' However, although at both moments it is possible to find the same rhetoric of sacrifice or self-sacrifice, during the *toma* times, guns and armed confrontation were inconceivable as they implied a level of violence incompatible with the ideal of fighting for the minimum requirements for a dignified life.

After this examination and from a political point of view, the major problem that arises is: what is the importance of context in the notion of politics as sacrifice and therefore in the production of collective action? Or, in other words, are the existence of the dictatorship and the lack of the minimum conditions to live the only contexts in which popular power can emerge – popular power understood as the autonomous, contentious and transformative power of the powerless people? Is such a collective result possible nowadays, in a neoliberal context? As I noted in Chapter 5, these questions are actually

the same questions that my communist friends have been asking themselves since the end of the dictatorship: what do we do now?

In this last chapter, I will try to approach this problem showing that the social phenomenon that allows collective action is not necessarily or uniquely connected with periods of contentious politics or general political mobilization, but can even be found nowadays in the *población*. Certainly, the expressions of this phenomenon do not have the same intensity or durability today as they seem to have had in the periods of general mobilization (the times of the *toma*, the struggle against dictatorship). However, my proposition is that the dynamics that led to collective action are as deep as the social fragmentation and division of the *población* and, therefore, that they go beyond the ethical contents of groups and networks of relationships in a particular time period.

This chapter has two parts. In the first part, I will use a description of one of the most compelling events of my fieldwork (the visit to La Victoria of Michelle Bachelet, the most prominent politician in Chile over the last 15 years and the current president), to discuss how particular people – or, as I call them, 'characters' – are able to give and receive affection in a transversal way. I will show that the main feature of these characters is that they can condense multiple persons within themselves, producing one-on-one relations with many people. I will characterize these relationships as highly sentimental (like any other relationship in the *población*) but also as 'imagined', as they can do without face-to-face interactions. Due to the position that characters occupy – beyond the divisions of social life – they are able to modify or alter the ethical frames of different people and groups at the same time.

In the second part of the chapter, I will describe another important incident from my fieldwork showing that condensation does not exclusively belong to characters and may be found in the most unexpected places and moments. Finally, I will analyse the political work that I carried out with my communist friends noting that performances of courage and conviction even today produce effects in other people's lives. However, these unexpected condensed effects are momentary due to the fact that these political activities lack a political narrative to connect them all through a current definition of sacrifice that could activate popular power.

**One act, two characters**

May 3rd, 2013. On the main street of *población* La Victoria, 30 de Octubre Street, an activity was organized in order to change the name of the local health centre from 'La Feria' to 'Padre Pierre Dubois'. The Municipality closed the street to motor vehicles and located a huge stage near the health centre with hundreds of chairs for authorities, other guests and elderly *pobladores*. The event sought to honour the memory of Father Pierre Dubois, one of the main characters in the *población* in the fights against the dictatorship over the 1980s and who had died of old age a year earlier (September 2012).

My connection to the event, however, had started some weeks before, when I received a phone call from Loreto, a civil servant at the Municipality, who invited me to participate in one of the planning meetings for the activity. This meeting took place in a room in La Victoria's health centre two days later and there were approximately twelve people present. After a few minutes at the meeting, it was clear to me that the event was being promoted and organized largely by the Municipality, as at least six or seven of the attendees were civil servants (mainly from the Culture and Social Organizations departments). The remainder of the attendees included the health centre's director, a representative of the Catholic community, a *pobladora* who had worked with the priest in social programmes during the dictatorship and a nun who had lived many years in La Victoria and was very close to Father Pierre. The meeting was led by the two civil servants of the Culture department (both inhabitants of La Victoria), who presented the schedule of what the Municipality had planned for the event. People in general agreed with most of the activities although, from time to time, the participants expressed some minor differences or proposed other activities. For example, the nun wanted to read a letter sent by Father Pierre's sister from France to express his family's gratitude to the community. They also talked at length about the photographs that would be used for the event, and agreed to talk with someone who could find some more.

This friendly atmosphere changed towards the end of the meeting when the representative of the Catholic community asked to speak and expressed their concerns regarding the nature of the event. He said, 'Father Pierre was in the first place a priest,

and I think that any homage should be focused on that fact. I think the event is not religious enough, there are more speakers from outside the Church than from inside'. These words started a heated discussion regarding the significance of the figure of Father Pierre. For the civil servants, the father was more than a regular priest as he represented the fight against dictatorship and what *pobladores* had experienced during that time. For the *pobladora*, Father Pierre was a symbol of communitarian work since all his life he had been devoted to helping the community and poor people in general. The representative of the Catholic community replied that what Father Pierre had done was ultimately because he was a priest, a representative of God on Earth. Interestingly, in all their interventions people used their personal stories with the father to support their position. Thus, everyone highlighted different aspects of Father Pierre (religious, political, social) and fiercely defended his/her position against other opinions. When the discussion seemed never-ending, another civil servant from the Municipality tried to mediate between the positions and in a very formal way said, 'Well, this is why Father Pierre is so important. He represents many things to all people. We need to express that diversity at the event'; and continued, addressing the Catholic representative, 'Of course the Catholic community and the Church will have a preponderant participation'. This statement ended the discussion and the civil servants rushed to finish the meeting.

During my time in La Victoria I had many conversations regarding the figure of Father Pierre. In general, most *pobladores* admired Father Pierre because he had chosen to live in the *población*: in one of my neighbour's words, 'not like us that we live here because we are from here'. He, a French priest, came to live there 'like any other *poblador*, as a poor person'. But especially, he showed everyone in the most difficult times, during the 1980s protests, that his vow to the *población* was genuine. Manuel told me, 'Everyone saw him risking his life for the *población*. He usually stood between military forces and *pobladores* while the police were shooting. Once, he lay down on the floor in front of a *tanqueta* to prevent it from coming inside the *población*. Everyone saw him doing that'. This unusual kind of commitment and courage allowed him to move easily between different groups in the *población*, who could not avoid him as he was not a threat. According to Beatriz, 'He dealt directly with the people. When he heard some gossip or a story he ran immediately to the house of the person

involved and talked to them. He could relate to and hear everyone but, at the end, he did what he wanted. Pierre was neutral to organizations'. Possibly, the discussion in the planning meeting that I have described was connected to Father Pierre's ability to reach out to different people and groups in the *población*.

Although the admiration for Father Pierre has continued after his death and has even increased over the last years, some people question his real importance during dictatorship. My friend Gabriela, a *pobladora* who had lived many years outside the country and arrived back to the *población* while I was there, told me, 'I do not know why everyone loves Pierre now. In the dictatorship, he was involved with everyone and was respected, but we [her cultural group at that time] hardly ever listened to him'. For Laura, a communist combatant during the 1980s:

> Pierre protected us but we did not want to be protected, we wanted to fight. When he was between us and the police, we shouted at him 'move, move!', because we could not throw stones at the police if he was in the middle. He shouted back at us 'stop throwing stones', but when he eventually moved, we resumed our battle.

Figure 6-1: Mural of Father Pierre (author's photo)

In my opinion, these criticisms question not Father Pierre's commitment to the *población* or his ability to speak to everyone, but the current atmospheric feeling that everything that happened in the *población* in the 1980s was related to Father Pierre. Thus, while Father Pierre is today the figurehead of the struggles against the dictatorship, the others who were involved in the fight – especially those who participated in armed groups – have become almost completely invisible.

When Amanda and I arrived at the event on the afternoon of May 3rd, my very first impression was related to the number of people who had gathered for the homage. Not only were all the chairs occupied (except for some in the front reserved for authorities) but the whole 30 de Octubre Street was also full of people. One day before, a rumour that Michelle Bachelet, former socialist president of Chile (2006-2010) and at that time standing to regain the presidency, would attend the event had come to me through a neighbour. I thought that this was unlikely due both to people's high discomfort with and contempt towards formal politicians (which makes them reluctant to attend mass activities) and the left-wing tradition of the *población* that increased the risk.

I looked for Bachelet among the people sitting at the front and I realized she was not present. We moved with difficulty between the people and got a standing place near the stage. The event soon started, more or less following the schedule that had been discussed at the planning meeting. It was clear that the Municipality had given more space to the Catholic Church and the whole first part of the activity was focused on prayers and religious speeches. After this, the event's host announced the participation of two *cantores populares* (folk singers), Jose Cerpa and Trayenko, who would perform two songs. They jumped on the stage and thanked the organizers for the invitation. The first song was related to the idea that dictatorship had not finished after the return to democracy in 1990 and that the current political order was a disguised continuation of the former. When they finished people clapped with respect. The next song was about Mapuche people's struggles against the Chilean state and the assassination of the young Mapuche Matias Catrileo by police forces in 2008, a tragedy which occurred during Michelle Bachelet's first term in power. The song explicitly mentioned her as responsible for Catrileo's assassination and called her a murderer. As if it was destiny, just when the singers were mentioning her for a second time,

Michelle Bachelet appeared from behind the stage, greeting the politicians that were in the first line of chairs, and sitting down on a free chair. Almost instantaneously, the amplified sound was turned off by the organizers and the band kept singing in a muted way. The censorship situation affecting the musicians on stage remained almost unnoticed by the people who, at the moment that Bachelet appeared at the event, started to stand up from their chairs and to surround her with obvious excitement. Suddenly, people spontaneously began to shout '*se siente, se siente, Michelle presidente'* (we feel it, we feel it, Michelle president). Beside me, Amanda contemplated the scene with obvious indignation and wrath. She told me, 'We used to be La Victoria, a combative place. But this, look, it is terrible. What has happened to us?!'

In the last part of the event, Michelle Bachelet was invited onto the stage and delivered a speech lasting under ten minutes. She remembered when she worked for some weeks in the health centre a long time ago (she is a doctor) and also dedicated some words of admiration to Father Pierre. Finally, she promised to work especially for the poor people if she was elected although she did not say much about her political programme as it was not yet ready. When she finished her speech, people clapped a lot and hailed her. Then, Claudina Nuñez, mayor of the district in which La Victoria is located and also a *pobladora*, delivered a speech for more than half an hour, narrating several of her personal stories with Father Pierre and remembering the years of dictatorship in the *población*. She concluded her speech with a strident declaration regarding the central importance of *pobladores* in the return to democracy and how, with her as mayor, they had taken another step towards a better life. The huge differences in terms of scenic display and rhetorical ability between Bachelet and Nuñez, in favour of the latter, were evident to me, although perhaps this only increased Bachelet's distance from traditional politicians. As had been planned, the whole event ended with the showing of part of a documentary film about Father Pierre.

I must admit that the event made a great impression on me particularly because I did not expect such a reaction from the people. Trying to understand what had happened in the homage activity and as the November presidential elections approached, I was involved in several conversations with different *pobladores* regarding the figure of

Michelle Bachelet. Although she did not enjoy the same transversal admiration that Father Pierre had in the *población*, many people spoke about her as if she was not part of the group of professional politicians that everyone criticized. Several of my neighbours, especially middle-aged and elderly people, considered her 'a good person', a person who 'suffered like us in the dictatorship, because the *milicos* [military] killed her father'.[46]

Sra. Margarita, a very committed left-wing elderly lady, told me in a very rational way (as if she was trying to convince herself of her position) that 'in her first government she helped particularly the pensioners by giving a minimum pension. I think in a new government she could do more'. In a more extreme way Rolando, an old communist *poblador*, referred to Bachelet as '*compañera'* (companion or comrade), an appellative used only for members of the Communist Party. Several *pobladores* who supported her or voted for her in the election did not actually share or even know many of her ideas and principles and they admitted to me that the only reason to support her was because they 'trusted her'. Alongside those who admired her or believed in her, there were many others who strongly criticized her, especially because they considered that she was as much part of the highly discredited political order as any other politician. For example, for most of my communist friends the decision of the Party to support her was a terrible situation as they saw her as part of professional politicians, part of those who had betrayed *pobladores* after the return to democracy, maintaining and deepening the social and economic model inherited from the dictatorship. However, despite the permanent critics, some of my friends finally voted for her (several others did not) in the presidential elections, arguing that they were following a Party decision. In any case, the support for Bachelet came from different groups, which did not imply that the differences separating them had been surpassed. In this context, not only had what occurred in the homage event become completely understandable and expectable,

[46] Alberto Bachelet, Michelle Bachelet's father, was a general of the Air Force who opposed the coup d'état of 1973. He died in prison in 1974 of a heart attack as an effect of the torture inflicted by other military. Many years later, Michelle Bachelet was appointed Minister of Defence during Ricardo Lagos' government (2000-2006) becoming 'the boss' of the military (those who killed her father), a position that transformed her into a political phenomenon.

but when Michelle Bachelet finally won the presidential election, both in La Victoria and in the country, I did not consider the result a surprise at all.[47]

**Condensation and 'imagined' social relationships**

Although Father Pierre Dubois and Michelle Bachelet have different biographical trajectories and their spaces of influence are dissimilar (a local level for Dubois and national level for Bachelet), as characters, they share several features. Firstly, both can be admired and supported by different people and groups in the *población* without producing any break-up or betrayal in the relationships between people. In other words, they are not considered a threat to the distribution of affection inside the groups and networks of relationships. Secondly, Bachelet and Father Pierre connect with the people and groups on a personal level. Thus, for example, I could note during my fieldwork that when *pobladores* referred to them they normally used an article before the name as in 'la Michelle' or 'el Pierre', which in Spanish is a convention applied to someone who you know personally, typically a friend. As I showed above, the discussion that I witnessed in the planning meeting for Father Pierre's homage was not founded on different analytical perspectives regarding his importance in the *población*, but on the personal connection that he had with the participants and through this with the topics that each person considered fundamental (religious, social, political, etc.). I could see this situation many times during fieldwork, even among the people who never had a proper personal relationship with Father Pierre (this is particularly clear in those who were too young to participate in the protests or who were born after the dictatorship). In the case of Bachelet, people normally talked about her as if they were talking of someone who was part of their network of relationships, sometimes gossiping as if they had been talking about a neighbour and other times speaking of her with the respect and care which is devoted to a family member or a friend. Many discussions between my neighbours started because some could not stand other people talking badly (in a gossip sense) of Bachelet.

[47] Michelle Bachelet won the elections with 62% of the votes while her rival Evelyn Matthei from the right-wing coalition obtained 37% of the votes (In La Victoria's district the difference was even more: 75% for Bachelet and 25% for Matthei). More impressive than these percentages was the high number of abstentions, reaching almost 60% of the people registered to vote, one of the highest in the world.

As we can see, what makes both Michelle Bachelet and Father Pierre special is that they can receive affection from different people and groups in the *población,* as if they were someone related – a relative, friend or neighbour – to everyone. However, this is not enough to build personal relationships. As we saw in Chapter 2, due to the limited affection available to a person in the *población*, the allocation of affection that produces social relationships occurs normally with those who are able to give affection in return. Otherwise, it would mean a waste of affection or a betrayal. In my opinion, a third and central feature that Michelle Bachelet and Father Pierre's characters share is that they can give affection to all the people or, in other words, that they can greatly enhance their amount of affection available to give to others. It is only through this 'special ability' – that other people lack – that they can establish personal relationships with everyone. How can they do this?

Common sense indicates that, in the case of Bachelet for example, she is prevented from establishing personal relationships with people she has never met. Similarly, it is doubtful that Father Pierre could have been able to establish personal relationships with everyone in the *población*, and even more so if we consider that his affection has increased over the last years, when he was ill and when he finally died in 2012. Moreover, this possibility contradicts a central point in the notion of affection as a limited good: every person must choose between different people and groups, otherwise the affection is not reliable and basically fake. For example, one could carry out the exercise of locating Father Pierre and Michelle Bachelet in particular groups (the Catholic community for him and socialist political groups for her), but as we saw before, both can be part of many groups and related to everyone at the same time. I think different people can relate to them in such a personal way because each relationship is understood in singular terms, as if Father Pierre and Michelle Bachelet were many persons at the same time (as many persons as there are groups or networks of relationships in the *población*). In this way, what I call 'a character' is a condensation – in a Freudian (2008) sense – of different persons, each of which produces unique relations with different people. Therefore, from the point of view of *pobladores* there is no affective stress or betrayal if other *pobladores* relate to these characters as well.

A character's capacity to condensate in themselves different persons and through this to establish relations beyond group boundaries is highly connected to the empirical fact that these characters do not need face-to-face interactions to build relationships as everyone else in the *población* does. For this reason, I propose the concept of 'imagined relationships' to refer to those relationships produced with characters, based on Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities'. They are 'imagined' because neither Bachelet nor Father Pierre are physically present in *pobladores*' everyday lives, but in people's minds 'lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 2006: 6). Their condition of being imagined does not imply that there is no observable connection with these characters or that these relationships are less affectionate – less real – than any other relationship. In the case of Father Pierre, his image is instantiated in many stories, anecdotes and memories that *pobladores* tell each other all the time, and in homage ceremonies such as the one that I described in the previous section. We can also find him portrayed in several mural paintings in the *población*. Likewise, Michelle Bachelet, since her emergence as a political force in 2002, has become part of the everyday intimate lives not only of *pobladores* but of many Chileans through one of the most powerful means of connection – television (see Chapter 5). Thus, *pobladores´* excitement when Bachelet appeared at the homage ceremony was based on the possibility to physically actualize a relationship that until then had been virtual. Through all these channels, characters remain present in *pobladores´* lives and produce 'imagined' but also highly affective relationships, much like any other person in the *población*.

The transformation of these particular persons, Father Pierre and Michelle Bachelet, into characters – their condensation – and the imagined affective relationship that people have built around their figures are obviously connected to the central position that they occupy in the political theology of contemporary Chile (Geertz 1983). Following Geertz, I do not consider that their charisma is based on objective personal attributes by themselves, but on the way that these attributes – including their biographies – are associated with the main cosmological event of Chilean recent history: the dictatorship.

On the one hand, we have already seen how Father Pierre currently symbolically represents the genuine commitment that *pobladores* from La Victoria developed to oppose the military apparatus of the dictatorship. In this sense, people have crystalized in his figure the collective and personal memories of the repression that he and everyone had to confront and the sacrifices that the fight implicated for every *poblador* (although some of my communist friends deny that he was in favour of the fight).[48] On the other hand, Michelle Bachelet is probably the last political figure that still preserves some of the genuine sacrificial substance that part of the political elite acquired as a consequence of the coup d'état and the subsequent repression, torture and exile. Thus, when she emerged in the political arena, Bachelet was presented to the population as unpolluted by the years of post-dictatorship politics, as if she had just arrived in the country from the exile to politically confront the dictatorship and to return the country to democracy – even though this had actually happened fifteen years previously. While the rest of the professional politicians are nowadays seen not only as traitors but also as selfish and corrupt – implying a previous affective connection that was at some point betrayed – Michelle Bachelet on the contrary was seen as genuinely sacrificing herself for the country and every particular person, becoming an allegory of the original connection between the returned politicians and the people, a connection that implicated the end of the dictatorship. In short, it is through the recognition of their selfless, unrewarded sacrifice at precisely the moment in which this sacrifice was credible, the dictatorship, that these characters condense multiple persons, giving and demanding affection to and from others and thus building personal but imagined relationships with people.[49]

While Michelle Bachelet and Father Pierre became characters as an effect of their connection to the events of the dictatorship, there are other figures in the *población* that possess the same attributes although their existence is not related to any specific

[48] Juan, a communist combatant from the 1980s, today politically inactive, told me the story of a meeting that he attended to in the 1980s with priests from several *poblaciones* of the southern area of Santiago. According to him while most of the priests were in favour of the *pobladores´* fight and even wanted to do more, Father Pierre was against any form of struggle. Because of this, Juan considers that the image of Father Pierre has been distorted by the years and the people.

[49] During her second presidential term (2014-2018), Bachelet was involved – through her son – in a highly documented case of corruption, which almost completely destroyed all her political capital.

event. *Pobladores* colloquially refer to these figures as '*personajes*' (characters). In short, they are people who live in the *población* and because of mental health issues, drug/alcohol consumption or particular personality traits (sometimes all of these together) have become a kind of clown for the *población*, locating themselves in the ambiguous condition of being at once *poblador* and outsider. A well-known example in the *población* was the case of Patito. He was a *poblador* with a mental health issue who used to spend most of his time on La Victoria's streets where he worked, played and talked to the people who he found on his daily path (he also used to fight a lot with the people who bothered him). Due to his condition and personality, Patito was considered a 'permanent child' therefore all the *pobladores* related to him. Sadly, some years ago, he was hit by a car and died. People told me that all the *pobladores* felt terrible about the accident and the whole *población* attended his funeral. According to a friend, 'the crowd was even bigger than the one that came to Pierre's funeral'.

Figure 6-2: Patito's shrine (author's photo)

Many times, when I was talking with my friends they fell randomly into conversations about these *personajes*, remembering their names, their particularities and laughing

about their own personal stories with them. In fact, I could say that this was a very common topic throughout the *población*. The main characteristic of all these conversations was, in my opinion, the affection that *pobladores* expressed when they talked about them. Thus, as with Michelle Bachelet and Father Pierre, people establish personal but imagined relationships with these ambiguous *personajes,* as they are incapable of connecting directly with the people but at the same time they are viewed as giving affection to everyone. However, unlike Michelle Bachelet and Father Pierre, these *personajes* do not have the need to prove that their affection is genuine through the memory of a sacrificial act. In this case, due to their condition they are considered essentially pure and genuine, as if they represent sacrifice itself. Hence, the *personajes* do not need any kind of historical reference to produce the imagined relationship, as the connection is produced automatically.

As we can imagine up to this point, because characters are a product of the condensation of multiple persons they can relate to everyone but cannot dissolve the barriers that separate people in the *población*. Characters are at the same time ordinary and extraordinary persons (Forbess & Michelutti 2013). They could be seen as ordinary, because their connection with *pobladores* is lived as any other relationship: through sacrificial acts – or automatically in the case of the *personajes* – they activate highly affective bonds, which consequently imprint and modify ethical frames in terms of distinctions, decisions and actions to conduct people through life (see Chapter 3). This includes, in my opinion, voting in elections in the case of Bachelet. Then electoral politics in the *población,* more than being an individual decision between candidates, is in fact the result of a prior imagined affective relationship between a person and the political character. This reminds us of anthropologists' questioning of the merely formal or contractual link between the represented and the one representing, or between people and the government (Forbess & Michelutti 2013, Geertz 1983, Holbraad 2014, Spencer 1997). At the same time, characters are not proper persons as, by definition, *pobladores* cannot relate to everyone and they need face-to-face interactions to activate and actualize relationships. Characters are then beyond the constraints of everyday life, thus becoming extraordinary. This can be perfectly exemplified with part of the speech made by Mayor Claudina Nuñez in Father Pierre's homage, regarding Father Pierre and Father Andre (who was killed by the military in

La Victoria in 1984): 'We used to think that Pierre and Andre were gods, super men. But when Father Andre died we realized that they were made of flesh and bone, like us. Then we realized that they could actually die!'

Although the characters' imagined relationships cannot dissolve the fragmentation and segmentation of the *población,* through their ability to connect to everyone they represent an internal/external space situated beyond the division of social life towards which different people and groups can converge. Thus, the practical effect of characters' position is that they can alter or displace several *pobladores*' ethical frames at the same time. In fact, this condensed space is the only solution for the enigma of collective action in the *población*. This is what happened, from my perspective, during the 1980s with *políticos* and especially with armed groups: it was their sacrifice that transformed politics into a sacrificial activity and consequently into a virtue for many groups within the *población* (see Chapter 4). Moreover, I think the same collective sacrifice performed during the 1980s, particularly by *pobladores* and other opposing groups – but experienced throughout the country – has been what has given legitimacy to formal politicians – including Bachelet – and to all governments after dictatorship.[50]

As we saw before, although extraordinary for their condensed properties, all these characters were not the result of their own objective features but of the way in which social relationships and persons are composed within the *población* in specific historical moments. In other words, they were produced and placed in the central position they have occupied or currently occupy by people's affection. This, in conjunction with the existence of ahistorical *personajes*, allows me to suggest that Father Pierre and Michelle Bachelet are not singularities but contingent results of the ordinary properties of social life in the *población*. In the second part of this chapter I will show several moments during my fieldwork in which I observed the phenomenon of condensation and the consequent activation of imagined social relationships after some *pobladores´* actions. However, as we will see, the effects did not last for so long and the relations quickly vanished. In none of these cases a new character properly

[50] 'Concertación' and later 'Nueva Mayoría' (the group of parties that opposed the dictatorship) have won all the elections since 1990, except for 2010 when a right-wing candidate, who also was opposed to dictatorship, became president (Sebastián Piñera).

emerged but during the moment they acted, they affected and altered other people´s ethical frames in the way that characters do.

**A day of protest nowadays**

September 11th 2013. The country was commemorating 40 years since the coup d'état of 1973 and on the *población's* streets *pobladores*' expectation and anxiety could be felt, probably more because of the symbolism of the date than the prospect of an unusual night. Since the end of the dictatorship, on this date every year some of the historic or famous *poblaciones* – such as La Victoria – become spaces of protest with violent clashes against the police. It is probably one of the two days of the year on which *poblacion*es become the centre of attention in the country, as TV news broadcast the expected riots live (the other is the day of the young combatant in March). But it is also the only day in which all Chileans revisit together the discussion regarding the events experienced in the country – Allende's government, the coup d'état, the dictatorship, the return to democracy – even when the right-wing press always seeks to take the debate towards the issue of security. In La Victoria during this night – year after year – *pobladores* are witness to the same violent acts, performed mainly by people from outside the *población* and drug gangs, and this for *pobladores* is a clear sign of the actions' increasing disconnection from their political origins. According to Manuel:

> Around these dates the *población* is filled-up with outsiders. I believe that they are anarchists that come from different places of the city and use the *población* as a fortress for fighting against the police. The rest of the protesters are drug gangs that take advantage of the situation to show off, try out and compare their guns. The meaning of these dates has been completely lost.

As expected, around 9pm the effects of tear gas from the confrontations at the southern limit of La Victoria (Departamental Avenue) could be felt within much of the *población*. While the regular protesters and the police performed the same highly ritualized actions of every year, within the *población* on 30 de Octubre Street there were an unusual number of people walking and talking in groups, as if waiting for

something. As I had already experienced the young combatant's day five months earlier and the interior part of the *población* had been almost empty on that occasion, I interpreted the appearance of people on the street as a result of the expectations that such a symbolic date had generated among the *pobladores*. I mentioned this to Manuel and he said, 'Yes there are more people than usual, but this is nothing if we compare it to the protests during the dictatorship; 30 de Octubre was always completely full of people.' Just a few moments later, we saw a group of young people carrying a wooden desk and, behind them, another group carrying a wardrobe. I remember that while looking at this strange scene I thought that maybe this was not the best moment for moving house. Soon I realized that they were heading with the furniture towards the corner of 30 de Octubre and Galo González Streets, the central point of La Victoria, where there were already other pieces of wood on the ground. Obviously, they were carrying these objects to build a bonfire, an action that was also understood by most of the people, who were starting to gather around. Fifteen minutes later, the crowd was bemused contemplating a large flame.

After a while, the bonfire continued to attract more people, especially those *pobladores* who normally just observe the protesters in Departamental Avenue. While some people were bringing more pieces of wood to maintain the dimensions of the flame and others were taking pictures with their phones, most of the people were just absorbed looking at the fire. The action's spontaneity became evident when nobody made a speech or read a text with an interpretation of the performance. Possibly, some of those who had initiated the bonfire were expecting the police to come into the *población*, moving the struggle to the inside. But the police were fully engaged in Departamental Avenue with the regular protesters. Thus, the action was simply the spectacle of the big bonfire. However, the scene changed in an instant. Suddenly, from one of the houses on the street corner where the bonfire was located, three women – aged between 40 and 60 – appeared, each carrying two big buckets full of water. Without saying anything or asking anyone, they approached the bonfire and threw at it all the water in their buckets. A general 'ohhh!' whisper was heard from the crowd. As the fire was still lit, the women went back inside the house, returning immediately with their buckets filled up. Again, they threw the water onto the fire, putting it completely out this time, and it was only when they were returning to their house that

a young spectator in the crowd shouted an insult at them, to which the women responded with a similar one. That was the end of the big bonfire. Only a few moments later did the people in the crowd begin to realise what had happened, and shouted some late insults. Finally, while some of the people went quickly to Departamental Avenue to see what was going on with the protest, most of the *pobladores* simply started to disperse slowly and walked to their houses.

This incident seemed very revealing to me and, because I could not fully understand it at the time, it brought on me a state of confusion that lasted for several days. Although at first sight the original action of the crowd – to build the bonfire – could be considered as an act of resistance against the socio-political model, perhaps some critique performed against the post-dictatorship order, when I was there the scene seemed almost completely meaningless. The action looked like an obligation: something that should be accomplished in order to comply with the ritual standards that people expected because of the symbolism of the day. In other words, I felt the crowd's actions to be part of the same neoliberal post-dictatorship world that they were supposedly confronting. On the contrary, although the actions of the women with the buckets could be understood as a call for a certain social order against the crowd riots, it rose in a completely unexpected way and therefore the women's actions appeared as a product of their own autonomous force. This ambiguity was evident in the reaction of the crowd to the women's behaviour, passively accepting the act of putting out the bonfire, as if the women's performance was more valuable than their own supposed act of resistance. But also from the other side, the women showed great courage confronting the crowd as if they were protected by something invisible.

Probably as revealing as the incident itself were Amanda's comments when I told her the story the following day. Laughing, she said, 'Of course, those women are women of the *población*, they are stronger, they are "*choras*" [brave]. None of the guys in the crowd would have had the courage to confront them.' At that moment, this explanation did not help me with my doubts. Why did the crowd react so passively in front of an action against their interests carried out by only three women? What did the women have that made them stronger than the crowd? What was protecting those women from a violent reaction from the protesters?

Now I think that the clue to answering these questions and to understanding what had happened that night was always in Amanda's words. Although Amanda was not personally involved in any of the sides of the story as she was not present and did not know the people, for her it was clearly evident that the women should be 'stronger' than the crowd (even if in the crowd there were also other *pobladoras*). In a way, Amanda was replicating from a distance the same perception that during the incident was shared by the people in the crowd. Thus, in the middle of the night, the crowd just saw three unknown *pobladoras* acting with a determined and honest attitude – purposeful, with conviction and clarity in their objectives and what they wanted to accomplish. This performance of courage, even thought it was in the exactly opposite direction of people's desires, located the women in a position of representation of the values of those who were in the crowd. An action of audacity and conviction was exactly what people wanted to perform in such a context of protest, and the *pobladoras* emerged as doing exactly that. As in a kind of dream, a relation was momentarily activated between the people and the *pobladores,* displacing the ethical positions of the people. Then, nobody opposed the *pobladoras'* actions and I even briefly felt that some people wanted to help them. However, the illusion was promptly broken at the end of the incident by the *pobladora* in the crowd who insulted the women when they were returning to their house after extinguishing the fire. The condensation effect of the *pobladoras'* act of courage and conviction lasted for a few minutes and did not transform them into proper characters, as the following day the *pobladoras* were again subject to the everyday limited relations with family, friends and neighbours.

This phenomenon of condensation and its subsequent imagined relationships, especially in its momentary form, has other important effects at the level of the *población*. In some situations, temporal ethical displacement can prevent divisions and differences in the *población* from becoming terrible clashes between people and groups or violent impositions of some people over others. A good example, already described in Chapter 3, and very similar to the one presented in this section, was the story that Gloria Rodríguez told me, of when she confronted alone a drug gang who were illegally blocking the street and charging people to pass. Here, the character that Gloria embodied in her performance allowed her to transform ethical distinctions momentarily just as the characters that the women with the buckets were performing

protected them in front of the crowd. In a fragmented space such as the *población*, in which groups have their own agendas and interests which are often opposed to each other, these momentary condensations allow them to keep a conflictive balance between groups that otherwise would not be able to coexist.

**Courage and conviction: transitory condensations in political work**

The phenomenon that I have described in this chapter is not just important because of the adjustments that it produces in everyday conflicts, nor because in its characters it crystalizes the acknowledgement of a shared history in the *población*, but because condensation is, in fact, the only channel or bridge through which divided groups and people can converge and, in this way, construct collective action. Thus, as ethical control beyond one's own social relationships – friends and family – is practically impossible, only relationships with the potential to reach everyone could produce effects on everyone. Periods of political mobilization in the history of the *población* during which groups as different as churches, criminals, cultural centres and political groups have acted together show us that collective action, beyond the fragmentation of the *población*, is indeed possible. But they also teach us that even during these special moments, fragmentation is never really overcome (groups do not fuse into each other), and that collective action is related to the production of characters – whether of flesh and bone or not – with whom different groups establish imagined relationships.

Paradoxically, although political groups are possibly the only ones in the *población* that directly and explicitly seek to build collective action, directing it towards certain objectives, they are, as much as any other group, limited to their own social relationships and without control beyond their own members. During my fieldwork, I was integrally involved with one of the political groups of the *población* (a Communist Party cell) and therefore I experienced this paradox as a permanent and fundamental condition of our work. Thus, any activity or action performed by my group, although it could seek to promote collective action or participation in the *población*, always implicated in the end a demarcation or demonstration of the distance that separated us from others. For example, among other activities, we created a web page to be used as a media platform for *pobladores* that was finally used only by us. We organized several homage activities in memory of people who fought during the dictatorship (members

of the *Frente* guerrilla or *pobladores* killed by the military), where most of the attendees were either relatives or friends of the people remembered or group members themselves. We performed public interventions on special dates (the vigil for the memory of Father Andre, the coup d'état day – 11th of September), lighting candles on the street and reading out speeches that, while making us visible to others, at the same time differentiated us from the rest. With the cultural centre version of my political group (that basically involves the same people as the party cell) we participated in the float parade during the *población*'s anniversary, which was essentially a demonstration of our own symbols and particular political identity. To sum up, all the activities produced the same basic effect: to highlight our differences with others.

The impossibility of escaping this paradox was, in fact, the fundamental reason for which the cultural centre was created. Nevertheless, after a year of work only three people had been incorporated into the group, two newcomers to the *población* (me and Jose) and the son of a former communist friend of the group (Sebastian), while a couple of others had left it. When my fieldwork time was finishing, in an attempt to change this situation I decided to write a project to apply for funding in order to entice more people to participate in the cultural centre. At a cultural centre meeting, we began to propose different projects: media equipment to implement a radio station, computer equipment for workshops, drums for a *batucada* (drum ensemble), etc. At some point I asked Nicanor and Claudio about the target of these projects and they answered together: 'Us, the project is for us'. This was the moment in which I realized that the failure to incorporate more people had not actually been a failure at all, but that the whole time the cultural centre worked under the exact premise that it supposedly sought to break: that distances with others are inevitable and therefore everything we do will always highlight that difference. In short, the cultural centre was never for other *pobladores* but 'for us', our own group.

Although I already had suspicions regarding the actual difficulties of going beyond groups in the *población*, the discovery that my own group – one of the few that was currently trying to build collective action – worked under the idea of its impossibility was the final evidence of the depth of fragmentation in the *población*. However, at the

same time I was confused regarding this idea, as I had felt during some of our activities that something special was happening. Basically, I had reached the conclusion that most of our activities had been successful, probably not in the sense of building collective action within the *población*, but at least in that they had produced some effects primarily on ourselves but also on the audience. For example, when we participated in the float parade we worked for a week building a big Soviet tank (made of cardboard and wooden boards) and making world revolutionary groups' and traditional Latin-American costumes, as we wanted to represent revolutionary struggles through history and their connection to the people. When the day of the parade arrived and we took our tank into the street, people were very impressed and many asked us how much time we had spent making it. During the event itself, when we paraded through an incredibly crowded *población*, I could see people's expressions when they saw us coming. On their faces there were a mixture of surprise and respect, not only because we were representing a well-known idea that connects to a part of the *población*'s history, but mainly because of the simple fact that we were there, on the street, exposing ourselves in front of the *población*. Finally, we won the float competition and we received our award on the stage of the anniversary main event.

This and other successful activities gave me the idea that without much effort we could easily both achieve the specific purposes of each action and connect with people. In other words, insofar as we committed to a specific task or activity (which happened randomly or inconstantly, see Chapter 5), we were capable of reaching whatever aim we proposed to ourselves. Thus, in activities such as anti-drug street interventions, children's day celebration or the homage to the *Frente's* murdered combatants, I realized that, even if our distance to others was reaffirmed in the end, during the activities people tended to react by accepting our performance or proposal easily as if everything that we wanted to transmit had been there all the time. What element did these successful activities have in common? From my experience, the key factor was not related to the activity's content or its format – as we can imagine due to their diversity – but to the courage that we showed carrying them out and the commitment and conviction in our principles that we naturally expressed to others while the activities lasted. Hence, as in the story of the women with the buckets or in Gloria Rodríguez's story with the drug gang, my group also experienced momentary

condensations in which we activated affective relationships with others through a performance based on courage and conviction. As in the stories of the 1980s, courage and conviction were interpreted as if we were doing something beyond our own interests and not looking for something in return, generating the illusion of our sacrifice. Automatically, we found ourselves transitorily representing characters, able to receive affection from everyone through condensation. We clearly experienced this transformation at the end of these successful activities, when people approached us feeling thankful for what we had done, as if an impossible everyday connection with them had been established and, therefore, as if we were no longer just one group in the *población*.

Nevertheless, contrary to figures such as Michelle Bachelet, Pierre Dubois or the '*personajes*', the imagined relationships that we saw appear in these activities were momentary, and immediately vanished when we all returned to everyday life. The next day we were just like any other *poblador*, and, if we happened to pass by someone who had been at the activity the day before, at most we would greet each other. We were no longer friends, we did not have any connection anymore. Thus, this group's condensation and its effects of ethical displacement were attached to the specific event or activity in which they appeared and therefore could not endure through time. In my opinion, this transitory condition is not related to the phenomenon itself but, in the first place, to the fact that these activities were completely disconnected from each other. In other words, each of these activities was unique and independent – there was no story or narrative that could connect them all. Even for us, as the extent of our commitment was unpredictable from activity to activity – not allowing all of them to be successful – it always seemed necessary to symbolically renew the group involved, even though in the end it was almost always the same. This permanent reconstruction prevented us from transcending the particular experience of the activity and from transferring the courage and conviction honestly expressed through it, even to our own everyday lives. Hence, my group lived through autonomous and sporadic events of condensation that had no further repercussions in the everyday lives of either the group members or of others. This lack of narrative link between actions is also an expression of the strong belief and sensation that anything they do could not modify a world that no longer depends on them (Chapter 5). In my opinion, the memories of what *políticos*

were able to do in the past, transformed any achievement in the present into something insignificant – and therefore they were not able to see the effects of any activity in the way that I did. On the contrary, working with them, carrying out activities and performing actions, I felt more powerful than I had ever felt before in my life.

From my experience, without a narrative between actions and also specific performances that connect with current definitions of sacrifice – not those of the past – it seems that transcending the momentary condensation of the political act is impossible. If La Victoria's history can teach us anything, it is that performances of sacrifice were able to activate popular power, and that this sacrifice seems to be always connected to expressions of courage and conviction. While I do not feel in a position to answer *políticos'* question, 'What do we do now?', I think a new question for them that perhaps could help them to move forward – as I know they want to – would be: What kinds of sacrifices should we carry out now to express our sacrificial commitment to what we believe in the context of current-day Chile?

## Epilogue

Some years have passed since I left the *población* and every now and then I return to visit my family (Amanda, Manuel, Carolina and Bruno), to see my friends (especially Ernesto, Nicanor and Rulo), to talk with my old neighbours and to participate in some of the activities that are carried out in the *población*. Sadly, while I was away some betrayals are said to have happened between the members of my political group and my friends that led to them breaking into two different groups. Visiting the *población* is therefore always emotionally complicated, especially when the two groups organize different activities for the same day and time and I have to decide which one to attend – betraying the group that is not chosen.

In any case, I always return to the *población* for the most important date: its anniversary. A big stage is set up between the streets of 30 de Octubre and Galo González and a crowd of people gather to watch the show – usually including famous artists that do their presentations free of charge just because it is La Victoria. In one of the anniversary celebrations that I attended after leaving the *población*, Gloria Rodríguez, *pobladora*, current councillor and communist militant, was the host of the show – she has actually hosted the show every year since the 1980s. It was around 6pm and it was still not full of people. At some point, Gloria was talking at the microphone, as the previous band was taking down their instruments in order to leave space for the next band. In her discourse, maybe without intending to, she mentioned the word 'politics'. People immediately started to jeer. Gloria Rodríguez made everyone be quiet talking loudly and strongly:

> Neighbours and comrades, you cannot do that. This *población* was not born out of nothing. It did not create itself. When our parents took over the *población*, what was that? Politics. We have built our *población* through politics, we are all '*políticos'*. What we are doing here, right now, is politics. You cannot jeer at politics, because it would be looking down on our history, looking down on our *población* and on all those who fought so that we could live here.

The crowd listened to this telling off silently and respectfully. Ernesto said to me, 'Now you can see how difficult it is to do something to change things. People hate politics'. However, it seemed to be that people had become silent firstly out of respect for Gloria, but secondly, that something else was happening. People were trying to come to terms with the idea – still sceptical – that the word 'politics' could mean two practically antagonistic things: what professional politicians (those that are completely discredited and considered selfish and corrupt) do, and what the first *pobladores* did (when they built the *población*) and what they do themselves every day. Gloria presented the next band and left the stage visibly upset.

This episode does not only reveal *pobladores'* – and Chileans' in general – well known disaffection for the political system and its actors, nor does it just show the differences in the definition of 'politics' between most *pobladores* and those *pobladores* known as *políticos* – like Gloria herself. Both of these statements are true, although the disaffection with the political system is the product of a long historical process that began in 1990 and the differences in definition are permanent – as I have shown in this research – and determine the existence of groups of *políticos* and the rest of *pobladores* through the history of the *población*. But beyond this, what this episode reveals that a performance such as Gloria's, based more on its dramatic strength that on its content, can turn an unthinkable or seemingly absurd definition of politics into an idea that may be conceived and considered as possible – at least for a moment. Gloria's discourse is absurd to *pobladores* – as it semantically brings together professional politics with their own daily actions. In spite of this, *pobladores* are able to carry out the mental exercise suggested by Gloria, because between them they share a historical relation that is actualized through performance. *Pobladores'* reaction shows, therefore, that their definitions, concepts and ideas are not objective but contingent, and may be altered through articulations and disarticulations in their daily-life social relations. Despite her momentary triumph, Gloria left the stage showing defeat, as if saying 'If *pobladores* think in this way, we will never again be what we have been in the past'. At this moment, the relation is disarticulated and the new definition fades away.

Throughout this thesis, I have suggested that *pobladores* develop a 'politics of everyday life' organized around sentimental articulations and disarticulations,

activations and deactivations in their relations with family, friends and neighbours. *Pobladores* are crossed by networks of relations of affection that make them who they are and connect them with and disconnect them from other *pobladores*. This sentimentality makes relationships very strong (they are viewed as unchangeable or predetermined) but also fragile (there can always be betrayals, although they are never expected). The separation of the closely-knit political group that I described here shows that relations based on affection have these two faces. This grammar of social relations forms a *población* that is very fragmented and heterogeneous, but also one where *pobladores* are strongly tied to each other in diverse and always contingent ways. This is the main reason why the historical moments through which the *población* has passed have been experienced relationally and collectively. In this way, the struggle against dictatorship was an experience of particular groups (with their own agendas and objectives) that converged independently in a collective and widespread process of political action of resistance. In the same manner, the end of the dictatorship and the new neoliberal context are also experienced as an independent alteration of the previous points of reference that organized the life-worlds of *pobladores.* But, at the same time, it is a collective situation from which not even *políticos* can escape. Therefore, the politics of everyday life continues to operate in different contexts connecting and disconnecting relationships.

Due to its own grammar, this politics of everyday life does not have a predefined objective, nor an end with a predetermined content. Because of this, subjecting to a particular social order or confronting it are both possible results depending on the relational articulations at any given time. To say that *pobladores* today are depoliticized or domesticated (Murphy 2015) is a statement that does not consider that the politics of *pobladores* did not and does not have an aim of being present or absent from the political arena. It is not a kind of politics that is necessarily oriented toward the national political system. If *pobladores* have irrupted into the political arena at certain moments, thereby playing a relevant role in the history of the country, it is not because it is in their nature to do so, because their situation is structurally unfair, or because they are a class in itself. Instead, when they have done so, it had been because some *pobladores* known as '*políticos'* have articulated in a certain way with the rest of the *pobladores,* being able to give a deliberate – but contingent – directionality to

the politics of everyday life. This directionality always implies the ability to condense multiple relations, thereby overcoming the affective limits that organize the politics of everyday life in the *población*.

Currently, these *pobladores políticos* are deideologized, depoliticized or simply enjoying the benefits of the neoliberal model – although, as we have seen, most of these benefits are not real for them. Within them survive the same wishes, hopes and principles that they once had and that led them to struggles against the dictatorship. However, they live in a permanent contradiction that derives from their current relational articulation. Stuck in a specific historical moment, they still do not know how to exit their own triumph-defeat impasse in order to reconnect with the politics of the everyday life of the rest of the *pobladores* as they did in the past. Self-convinced that they are incapable of giving directionality to the *población*, they act in the world without realizing the small daily triumphs that they achieve and the power that they still have. Many of the stories in this thesis as well as this anniversary event demonstrate this self-fulfilling prophecy: 'As we know that nothing that we do will be able to change a world that no longer belong to us, then we act knowing beforehand that anything that we do will not have any effect'.

Despite this description of the current condition of *pobladores políticos,* this thesis regards positively the political potential of *pobladores*. It is positive not in the sense that it is possible to glimpse an alternative project of society or the germ of some future transformation projected from this popular space. In fact, I left the field with the feeling that it was very difficult for things to change for *políticos*, for them to really connect again and re-articulate with the *población*. But, at the same time, I left feeling that I had never before felt that I had so much power to change the world as when I was with them. It is a different kind of power that is not gained on the battle field, nor in the political arena. It is the power of being with others in the world, of being tied to others and therefore of being more than just oneself – in spite of the political impasse that the *políticos* are going through. This thesis has a positive view not because *pobladores* are able to or will actually change the social order, but because they still have in them the ability to produce always contingent new forms of relational/ethical articulations. It is positive because I could see that the definite neoliberal transformation is not such a

thing and that *pobladores* live in historicity and contingency. It is positive because it shows that there has not been 'an end of history' and that *pobladores* are still building their *población*.

Finally, this thesis addresses those who still today are searching for ways in which to make changes in the world. In a certain way, *pobladores políticos* represent, from their own small space, those thousands of people engaged in politics who were left without a project and saw their own defeat in the hands of this new capitalism (neoliberalism) and the new world order after the fall of the USSR. From the politics of the everyday life of *pobladores* and their past and present relational articulations, it is possible to extract some lessons that, although not expandable or applicable to all social spaces, can contribute to rethinking the situation of popular sectors as subjects of transformative politics.

Firstly, a classic ideal of the left has been their interest in achieving the unity of the working class. This is considered as a primary objective of transformative politics. As those who are exploited are greater in numbers, an alliance between them seems to be the only effective confrontation to the elites of the world – those who have always had power and the means to exert that power. Although the idea of the existence of a transcendental subject that has the innate ability to carry out its historic destiny is not acceptable today, still theorists are looking for ways to produce new collective subjects, although not essentialist but contingent, like historic bloc, the people, the multitude (Gramsci 1997, Laclau and Mouffe 1985, Laclau 2005, Hardt and Negri 2004). La Victoria's history and the way in which the politics of everyday life is built shows that, at least amongst *pobladores,* all claims of unity are an illusion. Even further, it is their heterogeneity that has allowed them to become powerful actors in the political arena in specific historical periods. A struggle that is as imbalanced as that of the *pobladores* is only possible due to the strong affective links that produce a sacrificial scenario. In fact, the political struggle in the 1980s and also the labour effort after the 1990s are results of the same strong relations and the need to sacrifice oneself to honour them.

Secondly, I suggest in this thesis that transformations seem to be directed by very specific groups that at certain moments are able to articulate with the rest through

sacrificial condensation that disseminates new ideas of virtue – making this idea not external to other groups but internal to them. Transformative politics does not spontaneously generate as a response to situations of injustice. Although, in shared contexts, it is specific groups that develop the necessary innovations for the injustices to be defined, contested and defeated.

Thirdly and finally, the way in which these political groups can alter the ethical frameworks of others is not through ideas, at a political-ideological level, or through discourse – unless this discourse is understood as a performance. In the *población*, this connection cannot take any other form than that of affection, through relations produced in living with others, in belonging to the same networks of relations. Political groups in La Victoria, as I was able to ethnographically observe, exist more due to the strong relations between their members than to their ideological or theoretical discourses.


Figure 7-1: La Victoria's logo and flag (author's photo)

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